

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 46.

NEW YORK, APRIL 19, 1899.

Price 5 Cents

LARRY LEE THE YOUNG LIGHT-HOUSE LIGHT-KEEPER.

BY
CAPT. THOS. H. WILSON



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LARRY LEE, THE YOUNG LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MANATEE LIGHT.

In the year 1868 there were many vessels wrecked on the Florida Reefs, and several captains of vessels claimed that they had been deceived by false lights, which led them to believe that vessels were unsafe in those localities. So numerous were the wrecks during that year, and so heavy the losses of marine insurance companies, that the Government was urged to build several additional lighthouses on that dangerous coast for the better protection of sailing vessels.

One of these lighthouses was built on a reef of rocks which ran parallel with the coast down near the famous Florida Keys—the most dangerous coast of all America.

It was called "The Manatee Light," and was placed in charge of Larry Lee, a son of old Tom Lee, one of the best known lighthouse keepers on the southern coast.

Larry was born in the old Tybee lighthouse, on the Georgia coast, and had spent all his life in lighthouses.

What old Tom didn't know about lighthouses no other man did, and his brave boy Larry knew as much as he did.

Larry was just twenty-one when the Government called for practical lighthouse keepers to take charge of the half dozen new lighthouses that had been built. Practical lighthouse keepers were scarce. It is not a business that is followed by anyone outside of lighthouses, and therefore the Government had but a small number to make selections from.

The pay is small—only about six hundred dollars a year, which is a small sum for one to shut himself off from all the world for.

The choice of the Manatee Light fell to young Larry, and he was the happiest youth in the world. He was to have old Lem, an old negro man as black as the ace of spades, as help. Lem had been with old Tom Lee for thirty years, and was noted for his fidelity, strength and good common sense.

We will not describe the parting of Larry from his mother and sisters. Rough as they were, they loved each other devotedly, and the ties that bound them could only be broken by death.

On reaching the Manatee Lighthouse Larry found everything new. But he and old Lem were familiar with lighthouse furniture, and were at home in a few minutes.

The boat which landed them from the Government vessel left to return, and they were alone together.

"Fo' de Lor', Marse Larry!" exclaimed old Lem, on looking around at the wild waste of water to the south and west of them, and the low coast to the north and east, "dis am de lonesomes' spot eber I seed, dat's er fac'."

"Yes, it does look lonely," said young Larry, looking around him, "but a lighthouse ain't a fashionable hotel, you know."

"I knows dat, Marse Larry, but look at dat lan' out dere! It's clean gone under when de tide rises. I 'spect de 'gaters hab ter clim' de trees ter get a sunnin'."

"Well, we'll soon get used to it. You look after the things below, and I'll go up and see what kind of a lamp they have given me." And Larry turned and began to ascend the spiral staircase which led up to the top of the lighthouse.

He had to ascend some eighty feet of the heavy stone structure ere he reached the top.

The lighthouse was built of heavy blocks of stone, with the walls very thick in order to withstand the terrible assaults of old Neptune.

About thirty feet above high water mark were the dwelling room—very comfortable and cozy—with a storeroom, where the provisions, oils, lamps and everything necessary to keep the light in perfect order were stored.

On reaching the top, Larry found the great lamps in position and in perfect order, ready to be used that evening if he saw proper to light up before the day named by the officials.

But the weather was fine, and Larry proposed to take his time to get the new light in good working order.

From the balcony of the lighthouse Larry saw several little huts back from the beach a couple of miles south of him. By the aid of the spyglass he saw several men with weather-beaten faces lying around one of the huts, mending nets, smoking pipes, and apparently taking life very easy.

Along the beach could be seen portions of vessels which had been wrecked on the treacherous reef the Manatee Lighthouse was intended to guard against.

"Those fishermen live a long way from a market," he muttered, "and surely don't make much money at the business. I don't see any place for curing fish. Ah! now I understand. I didn't think of it before. They are wreckers."

Larry gazed at the half dozen bronze-faced men through his spyglass, and watched their movements for some time.

"Ah!" he exclaimed again. "One of them is taking a squint at me with a ship's glass. Well, I can stand it as long as they can, I reckon."

After looking for nearly an hour Larry laid down his glass and turned his attention to the great lamp. He wound up the great spring which, like an immense clock work, was to revolve the light.

It is a mistake that many people have that lighthouses use revolving lights. The sun is said to rise and set, but we all know that it does not move. The earth revolves. That's all.

So with the Manatee Light.

The great lamp remained stationary, but a frame revolved around it, shutting off the light once every sixty seconds for the space of twenty seconds, so its light seemed to close once every minute.

So clear and powerful was the light made by the burnished reflectors that it could be seen twenty miles at sea in clear weather.

Larry watched the great revolving frame as it revolved slowly round the great lamp and saw that it worked all right, after which he went below for oil to fill the lamps. He found Lem busily engaged in examining the supplies the Government had furnished.

"How do you find things, Lem?" he asked of the faithful black.

"Dey hab gib us 'nuff ter lib on a yeah, Marse Larry," said Lem, "dat's er fac'."

"How about fresh water?"

"De tank am chuck full."

"Then we are all right—the rowboat is a good one, I see."

"Yes, sah."

"Do you know where the oil can is?"

"Yes, sah," and he went into the storeroom in search of the can.

"Bring it full of oil, Lem," said Larry, as he turned to the window to gaze out on the illimitable waste of water.

In a few minutes Lem returned with the can of oil, which Larry took and carried up to the top.

Whilst Larry busied himself in filling the lamps, trimming the wicks and cleaning the glass, Lem began to prepare his first meal at the lighthouse.

The old darky had been thirty years in lighthouses, and knew just how to work. He threw out a hook and line, and in a few minutes drew in a fine bass, which he at once prepared for the pan.

In ten minutes after leaving the water that bass was frying in the kitchen of the lighthouse.

Very few people except fishermen can appreciate the difference between a fish only ten minutes out of the water and one which has been dead ten hours.

If the young reader wants to know what fresh fish means, let him take a live fish, kill and cook it immediately, and then he will always know something about fresh fish. Otherwise he will not.

When he was through with the lamps, Larry came down just as old Lem put the fish, coffee and bread on the table.

"Ah!" he said, "that smells good, Lem."

"Yes, sah, an' I reckon youse tink 'em good, too, Marse Larry," replied the old darky. "Dat bass was erlibe jes now."

"Where did you catch him?"

"Down dar by de rock."

"Well, I'm hungry enough to eat half of him," and Larry sat down to the table to make an attack on the fish.

"I kin eat de udder half," said Lem, grinning and smacking his thick lips.

Larry fell to and ate heartily, but before he was half through with his meal he heard the splash of oars outside.

He looked up at Lem and asked:

"Who is that?"

Lem went to the window and looked out.

"Dere's fo' men in er boat, Marse Larry," said Lem.

"Coming here?"

"Dey is come already."

Larry got up and went to the window.

"Hello, mate!" called one of the men in the boat on seeing Larry at the window. "Let us come up and see the light."

"Who are you?" Larry asked.

"Fishermen," was the reply. "We live in those huts back there," and the man stood up in the boat and pointed in the direction of the huts on the beach.

"Go down and open the door for them, Lem," said Larry, and the old darky obeyed.

In a few minutes the four men followed Lem up into the dining room, where Larry received them.

"Take seats," he said. "We are not in good ship-shape yet. Have you had supper?"

"Oh, yes, an hour ago," was the reply. "We come over to see the new light. We never was in one afore."

"Well, if you will wait till I finish my supper I will go up with you and show you how it works."

"Yes—yes, we'll wait," said a stalwart, bronzed man, whom the others called Captain Blake. "We are in no hurry, you know. The sea is smooth as glass and little wind."

Larry thought he was educated above a mere fisherman, and noticed that he was carefully inspecting everything he could get a glimpse at. But he made no remarks that would make his visitors think he was not pleased at their visit.

The meal over, Larry said:

"I am now ready to go if you are."

"Oh, we are ready," and Captain Blake led the way behind Larry.

When they reached the top the sun was just going down in the ocean.

"You are not going to light up to-night?" Blake asked.

"No; Thursday is the day appointed by the Government to commence," replied Larry.

Blake went out on the little balcony, which extended all round the lighthouse, and looked down at the water below.

"How high is it?" he asked.

"The light is eighty feet above high water," said Larry.

He looked again.

The water covered the rocks to the very base of the lighthouse except on the south side. From that height they seemed like huge black monsters in the water.

Larry then explained the working of the light in a very lucid manner.

"How long have you been a lighthouse keeper?" Blake asked.

"I was born in the Tybee Lighthouse," was the reply.

"Oh, you know all about them, then?"

"I think I do."

"You feel lonesome at times?"

"No; I have always lived in one, and therefore never get lonesome. I generally keep books on hand to read."

"Ah! yes, I see. You have no other help than the colored man downstairs?"

"That's all."

Larry thought he saw a significant glance pass between Blake and one of the men, and inwardly vowed that they should never be admitted again.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD NEGRO'S STORY OF A WRECK.

"Do you sit up all night to watch the light?" Blake asked, after a pause of several minutes.

"I see that it burns steadily all night," was the reply, and then Larry turned to lead the way downstairs again.

The men followed, and out on the rocks, at the base of the lighthouse, Blake said:

"We are much obliged to you, mate; come over and see us some day. We are sociable, eh, mates?"

"Yes—come over and see us," said the others.

"Thanks," said Larry, "but I am not allowed to leave here unless by express permission, or the exigencies of the service demand it. Good-night," and ere the men could reply, he had passed inside and closed the door, the heavy bar dropping into the massive brackets with a dull, heavy thud.

Blake and his three companions glanced at each other in some surprise, and then entered their boat without uttering a word, for old Lem's woolly head was seen at the little window some thirty feet above them.

Larry returned upstairs and found old Lem still at the window.

"Well, what do you think of them, Lem?" he asked.

"Don't tink nuffin ob dem, Marse Larry; dey is bad uns."

"Why do you think so?"

"Kase dey is. Dat big man wif de brack beard am got er bad look, Marse Larry."

"Just what I think, too, Lem. I don't like their look at all."

Old Lem said nothing, but went on with his work, and when he was through, went up on the balcony to look upon the sea under that soft tropical starlight.

"Dis am jes lubly, Marse Larry," said the faithful old black, as he gazed out upon the mirror-like expanse of old ocean.

"Yes," said Larry, "it is indeed beautiful; but you know terrible storms prevail in this latitude sometimes."

"It kain't blow down dis heah lighthouse, Marse Larry?"

"Of course it can't. It was built to stand the worse storms of this latitude. There's no danger of this thing blowing down."

They stayed up at the top till bedtime, and then went below and turned in—each having a small room to himself.

The next morning Lem was up early, before all the stars had faded away, and saw millions of water fowl flying about in every direction. They were leaving their roosting places to go to their feeding grounds all around that vicinity.

By the time Larry was up the old darky had breakfast ready for him. He ate it and then went up to the balcony, gun in hand, to get a shot at the ducks and geese.

He had not been there many minutes ere he saw a large goose com-

ing directly over him, and not very high above the light. He aimed and fired at it. The fowl gave a "quonk" and dropped on the balcony at his feet.

"That's a goose for dinner," he remarked, and then he fired at another. The more he fired the more he seemed to have around him.

Several came near enough for Lem to kill them with a pole, and in a few minutes he had a dozen lying on the rocks below.

"I'se gwine to hab some goose ile for my roomertiz," he said, as he looked down at the dead and wounded geese on the rocks.

The tide was very low, and the long line of reefs could be traced distinctly with the naked eye.

There was a gentle swell, and as the water rushed through and over the rocks, a long line of white foam could be seen for miles stretching away to the south and north.

Lem finally grew tired of striking at geese and went below to gather up his spoils. There were nearly a score of wild geese which he had brought down with the pole.

"Fedders am wuff er half a dollar a poun'," he said, "an' goose meat am good to eat," and he smacked his lips in anticipation of a fat goose for dinner.

During the forenoon Lem was sitting on one of the rocks at the base of the lighthouse, when he was astonished at seeing an old negro man as black as himself coming toward him from the mainland in a dugout. He was amazed, because the swell of the ocean threatened every moment to swamp the clumsy craft.

"Bress de Lor!" exclaimed Lem; "whar youse gwine, nigger?"

"I'se gwine fo' ter come ober dar," replied the strange negro.

The old darky shot forward, and his canoe wedged in between two sharp rocks and stuck there.

"Hi, hi!" exclaimed Lem, "youse come fo' ter stay heah, too, yer fool nigger!"

"What call's you got ter, call me er fool niggah?" demanded the visitor, rising and walking forward to the rock as easily as if he were on terra firma.

"Kase youse canoe am stuck in de rocks," replied Lem.

"Let her stick; who keers? Whar's yer boss?"

Lem stared at the old man, whose wool was almost white with age, and wondered what the old negro could want with Larry.

Just as he was going to reply to the old negro, Larry came down and asked:

"What do you want, old man?"

"Am you de keeper ob dis yer lighthouse?" the old man asked.

"Yes, I am the keeper. What can I do for you?"

"Yer can't do nuffin' fo' me. I'se ole now, an' bime-by I'll lay down an' doan't wake up eny more."

"Dat's er fac'," assented Lem, who was listening.

Larry saw, however, that the old man had come over on business, and therefore concluded to wait until he was ready to divulge it.

The old man looked Larry over from head to foot and said:

"Youse don't want no mo' fishermen ober here?"

"No," said Larry. "We can catch all the fish we want."

"Dey ain't fishermen—dey's wreckers, dey is."

Instantly a flash passed through Larry's mind that the old negro had come to reveal the character of the men in the huts on the beach to him.

"Just what I thought, old man," said he. "Do you know anything about them?"

"Yes, sah, I does."

"Come over to tell us about 'em?"

"Yes, sah, kase dey is bad uns, sah!" replied the old darky.

"Where do you live, old man?"

"Ober dare in de swamp."

"In de swamp!" exclaimed Lem.

The old man gave him a look of contempt, and made no reply to his ejaculation. Then, turning to Larry, said:

"Dem wreckers am bad uns, massa. Dey kill my Ned kase he wouldn't bury a purty young gal in de swamp."

"Bury a young girl in the swamp!" exclaimed Larry, suddenly deeply interested in the old man.

"Yes, sah!"

"Bress de Lor!" ejaculated Lem, looking away toward the huts on the lower beach.

"Tell us about it, old man," said Larry, taking a seat on a rock and tendering the old man a piece of plug tobacco.

The old man took the tobacco and cut off a good chew, and gave the plug back with a—

"Tank yer, massa."

Then he told, in his own way, how a vessel was wrecked one night on the reef below where they were sitting, in a gale. Nearly all night the wreckers paced up and down the beach, carrying lights on long, limber ash poles, waving them so as to make them resemble the lights of a ship. These lights deceived a vessel which was caught in the gale, and her doom was sealed. She struck the reef and went to pieces. The beach was strewn with the wreck and cargo, several dead bodies and four half-drowned persons—three men and one beautiful young girl. The old negro was the first one to go to the assistance of the young girl. He saw that she was yet alive, and gave her to his son to carry away out of reach of danger. The white wreckers came along, killed the men, and told Ned to bury the girl in the swamp. He swore he would not, and they shot him. Then the old man was ordered to bury her in the swamp, and he said he would. He took her in his arms, carried her into the swamp, and, instead of burying her, carried her to his cabin, hid her away, and had his old wife work on her to resuscitate her. He reported to the wreckers that he had buried her, and then went to work to bury his son. Fear of the wreckers prevented him from taking any exceptions to what they had done. But he had never put in an appearance after that when there was a wreck on the reefs. The wreckers had lots of buried treasure somewhere around there, as they secured large prizes from the wreck.

"Where is the young girl now?" Larry asked, with interest.

"In a hut in de swamp," replied the old man.

"Has she been there ever since the wreck?"

"Yes, sah. She was afraid to go away from dar."

"She will be safe here," said Larry, quickly, "and when the Government vessel comes with supplies she can go with it to any port she wants to reach. You may bring her here, old man."

"Tankee, massa. She'll be eber so glad o' dat."

"Be careful and don't let the wreckers see you," cautioned Larry.

"Yes, massa. I'll fotch her in de night."

"Can you bring her here to-night?" Larry asked.

"Yes, massa."

"Then take the lighthouse boat and go for her. Tell her she shall receive the protection of the United States if she comes here," and Larry at once ordered Lem to assist him in launching the boat for the old man.

The canoe was still stuck in between the jagged edges of two rocks, and was held fast.

When launched, the old man got into the boat and pushed off, going direct for the mainland, till he was lost in the gloom of the night.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAIDEN CAST UP BY THE SEA—THE DEATH STRUGGLE ON THE BALCONY.

LARRY gazed after the old negro till he and the boat were lost in the darkness, and then turned to old Lem and asked:

"Well, what do you think of it, Lem?"

"I tinks him er sassy ole niggah, sah," replied Lem, who could not forgive the old man's impudence to him when he first landed at the lighthouse.

"But what do you think of the wreckers?"

"Dem wreckers am de wustest people in the worl', Marse Larry."

"I think they are about as bad as the pirates on the high seas."

"Yes, sah. And old Lem wondered if any human beings could be worse than men who murdered helpless shipwrecked sailors as they were cast up by the sea."

"Lem," said Larry, "we must give her my room, and I will sleep in the dining room or up under the light."

"Yes, sah."

Both waited till near midnight listening for the sound of oars. They could hear only the gentle murmur of the sea as it caressed the rocks of the reef on which Manatee Lighthouse stood.

"Dar!" whispered old Lem at last, whose eyes and ears were of the best. "Dar he comes."

Larry listened, and soon heard the faint sound of oars coming from the mainland.

Pretty soon the boat came in sight. Larry knew it. It was painted white, and could be plainly seen.

Two persons were in it.

"Be careful," said Larry; "don't strike the rocks, old man."

"Yes, sah, I'se keerful," and he brought the boat alongside the rock on which Larry was standing.

A young girl, tall and slender, stood up, and Larry extended a hand to her.

"Are you the lighthouse keeper?" she asked in a low, sweet voice, as she placed her hand in his.

"Yes, miss, and everything here is at your service."

"Oh, yours is the first white man's voice I have heard in seven months! I have been in the keeping of this old man for seven months, and he is the kindest man I ever knew. I will never forget you and your good wife, old man."

"Tankee, missus. Bress de Lor' youse safe now," and the old man's voice trembled as he spoke.

"Old man," said Larry, grasping the old negro's hand, "if you ever want a friend or protection for yourself or wife, come to Larry Lee at the Manatee Lighthouse."

"Tankee, Marse Lee. Old Sancho will 'member dat. Good-by, missus. I'se glad youse safe, an'—"

"You can't go now, Sancho," said Larry. "You will have to wait for the tide before your canoe will be loose from the rocks."

"Yes, sah. I'll wait for de tide."

"Take him into the kitchen, Lem, give him something to eat and a bottle of brandy."

"Yes, sah—come erlong, ole man," and Lem led the way behind Larry and the young girl.

She held tightly to his arm as she ascended the stairs.

"This looks like a massive prison," she said, looking around at the solid stone walls.

"So it does. It is made to withstand the assaults of the ocean. Here we are. I know you will like a glass of brandy to strengthen your nerves. Take this seat, and I will fetch you a glass," and he hastened away to bring her a glass of brandy.

He had not seen her face.

When he returned she was standing by the table, her bonnet off, and a wealth of raven hair hanging over her shoulders and down her back. He thought her the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld. Her face was dark—almost olive in complexion, and he thought at first she was Spanish.

He stopped to gaze upon her loveliness.

"I am sorry to impose on your kindness, sir," she said, "but my father will repay you for all your trouble."

"If I can do anything that you will appreciate, miss, your father could not reward me with a million dollars."

"Oh, sir, I do appreciate your generous offer. This is a palace in comparison to the hut in the swamp, and this brandy is the nectar of the gods. Heaven has sent me a friend in you, and Heaven will reward you."

"This is your room as long as you remain here, and everything is at your service. Will you tell me your name and where your father lives?"

"Yes; my name is Anita Narcissa, and my father is Don Juan Narcissa, of Santiago, Cuba. I have been four years at school in New Orleans, and was on my way back home with my uncle in one of my father's vessels when the storm caught us. Oh, it was terrible. The vessel went to pieces on the rocks about daylight. I was washed overboard and swallowed up in the water. I knew nothing more until I came to and found old Sancho and his wife bending over me in their little hut in the swamp."

"It was indeed terrible, Miss Narcissa," said Larry. "I have seen many vessels wrecked, for I have always lived in a lighthouse—was born in one."

"Then you know something about the horrors of a wreck?"

"Indeed I do. You may dismiss all your fears now. This place is as strong as a fort, and the wreckers cannot get at you here. The Government vessel will call here in three months, when you can go back to New Orleans to take steamer for Santiago."

"Thank you, sir. You have not told me your name."

"Larry Lee, Miss Narcissa, and it is the name of a man who is proud of it."

"You ought to be, for it is a proud name in American history," she replied.

Larry then bade her good-night and went into the kitchen to see

how Lem and old Sancho were getting along. He found both old negroes enjoying the bottle of brandy together, and growling more communicative every minute.

"The tide is up now, Sancho," said Larry, "and we'll try to get your canoe out for you."

"Yes, massa," and the two old darkies, now good friends, followed him downstairs to the rocks where the canoe was fastened.

It required considerable work to get the canoe loose, but they succeeded at last, and the old darky struck out for the mainland.

The next morning the sky was overcast with heavy clouds, and the sea moaned as if in trouble.

"We will have a blow within twenty-four hours, Lem," said Larry, on taking observations, "so look out for everything."

"Yes, sah," and the faithful fellow did look out, and left nothing lying around loose for the mad sea to claim.

Anita Narcissa awoke in time for Lem's breakfast, which he had prepared with usual care, and complimented him highly on his skill as a cook.

As the day wore on everything pointed to a storm that night. Several vessels low down in the horizon could be seen from the balcony of the lighthouse.

The young girl came timidly up to the balcony and gazed round at the threatening clouds, and listened to the beating of the waves against the base of the lighthouse.

"Oh, this looks just as it did on that fatal evening the Navarro was wrecked!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. I think we are going to have a blow," said Larry, "but we have no fears of it here."

"This is like a solid rock," she remarked. "Oh, I feel that I am up above the cruel waves now—that they cannot reach me."

"Nor can they. This lighthouse is as strong as a mountain, Miss Narcissa."

"Will you light up the lamps to-night?" she asked.

"Yes—though it lacks two days of the time set by the Government. I think it will be nothing but right that I should, as it may be the means of saving some vessel, and it may be many lives."

"Oh, yes—how noble and humane you are!"

Larry blushed like a schoolgirl and turned away to light up the lamps, as the sun was setting. She stood by and watched him as he lit the lamps and set the revolving flame to going.

"Now," he said, stepping back from the lamps, "that light can be seen twenty miles at sea."

Anita had picked up the spyglass and was gazing round at every sail in sight, of which there were five, and then along the beach.

"Oh, Mr. Lee!" she exclaimed, "just see how excited these men are over the light!"

Larry turned and took the glass. He leveled it toward the wreckers' huts on the lower beach, and saw the men gazing at the light and gesticulating excitedly, as though in an angry discussion over it.

"They are simply surprised at my lighting up two days ahead of time," said Larry. "Let's go down to supper, as I hear Lem's whistle below."

He led her downstairs to the little dining room, where old Lem had a fine roasted wild goose waiting for them.

Of course they enjoyed the meal. Who wouldn't?

"I don't want to see or hear the storm," said Anita, when they had finished the meal. "It gives me a feeling of horror which I cannot shake off. I will lock myself in my room and stay there till morning."

"Just as you please," said Larry, "only don't have any fears whatever. Good-night."

"Good-night," she replied, and they both left the dining room, she to her apartment and Larry to the balcony above.

Lem was left in the kitchen and dining room. He finished the goose, put away the dishes, and then went down to close up for the night.

The waves were beginning to break over the rocks. He opened the door to take a last look at them, when two stalwart men dashed up and seized him.

"Lef go dar!" he cried, struggling to free himself.

"Run up, cap, quick!" cried one of the men. "I'll take care of this black imp!"

"Yer will, honey!" cried Lem, as he heard footsteps rapidly ascending the stairs. "I'm er bad nigger, dat's er fac!" and he made a desperate twist and freed himself from the man.

"I'll cut your heart out, you black imp!" hissed the man, rushing upon him with a formidable knife upraised.

Lem only uttered a growl as he caught the arm as it descended with the knife. In another moment the knife fell to the ground, and the two men were on an equality.

"Youse am a bad man!" cried Lem, giving him two or three blows that stunned him into insensibility.

"Guess dem sharks'll tink youse good 'nuff ter eat," said Lem, picking him up and tossing him into the sea.

Then, thinking of Larry and the young lady, he dashed up the stone stairs, after closing the door, to the assistance of the young lighthouse keeper.

Larry was standing by the light, admiring the working of the revolving frame, when he heard footsteps behind him.

Turning sharply around, he found himself face to face with Captain Blake, of the wreckers. Blake's eyes were all ablaze.

"You are two days ahead of time!" hissed the wrecker. "Put out that light or die!" and he held a long knife threateningly in his hand.

Larry caught the situation in an instant.

The wreckers expected two or three wrecks on the reef that night and a rich harvest of plunder. He had no weapon in his hands, and yet he defiantly replied:

"Never!"

With a serpent-like hiss Blake sprang upon him. Larry caught his wrist, gave it a sudden, powerful wrench, and the knife fell to the floor of the balcony.

Then came the death struggle.

Each strove to hurl the other over the balcony into the boiling depths below. Round, round, they went, every muscle drawn to its utmost tension, for it was life or death to them.

Suddenly Larry gave a twist that sent his assailant reeling over the railing of the balcony. A wild shriek escaped Blake, and the next moment he was hurled into the roaring sea below.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST LIGHT AT MANATEE—THE TERRIBLE STORM AND RAIN OF FOWLS.

FAITHFUL Lem ascended the stairs as fast as he could, and reached the top just in time to see the wrecker hurled over the balcony into the raging depths below.

"Good Lor'!" he exclaimed. "Dat's de way I done toder one."

"Was there another one?" Larry asked, breathing hard after his desperate struggle.

"Yes, sah—dere was two on 'em, an' I frowed one on 'em in de sea."

"That was right. The scoundrels hoped for a wreck or two to-night, and this light was in their way. How did they get in?"

"I opened de door for ter see ef eberyting was dar, an' dey run in on me. Good Lor', Marse Larry, but dey was bad uns!"

"Of course they were. You must keep a sharp lookout for them after this, as the Manatee light will break up their business and make them desperate."

"Yes, sah. I don't lef de door open no more arter dis."

Larry received no damage from the struggle save in having his coat torn. That he did not mind, as he had several more like it in his chest.

He picked up the knife which had fallen from Blake's hand and examined it. It was newly sharpened, and evidently intended for destructive work in the event of resistance in the lighthouse.

"Can you use this in the kitchen, Lem?" he asked, handing the knife to the faithful negro.

"Yes, sah."

"Take it, then, and don't say anything to the young lady about it. I don't think she knows anything about this visit."

"No, sah—I won't say nuffin," and the faithful black took the knife and went down into the kitchen with it. He saw that the entrance below was properly barred, and then went back up to the light to watch the progress of the gale that was coming.

The wind was now rising very fast, and in another hour it was blowing a gale. It howled round the great tower, and the waves came rolling in with a force that would have torn a ship to pieces.

But the roar of the waves as they rushed over the reefs was deafening. Ten thousand demons turned loose could not have made a thousandth part of the noise that then prevailed.

The rain came down in torrents and blinding flashes of lightning illuminated the surrounding darkness. It may have thundered, but Larry Lee did not hear it. No thunder ever equaled the roar of the waves over the Florida reefs in sound or fury.

Larry was standing near the light watching its steady work in the wind and rain when he imagined he felt something whiz by his head. He looked around and saw Lem standing close to the light on the land side.

He moved round to speak to Lem when, whack! something took him on the back of the head and he went down like a log.

Lem stooped and picked him up. He was too confused at first to know just where he was.

"What's the matter, Lem?" he hoarsely asked.

"Ax dat ole goose, Marse Larry," answered Lem, pointing to a dead goose which was lying on the balcony floor at his feet.

Larry looked at the goose for a moment, and then took it up. It was a heavy one.

"Ah! It was a hard thump, Lem," he said, dropping the goose.

"Hard enough to knock a horse down."

Whack! came another against the revolving frame, and a goose fell to the floor, fluttering in the agonies of death.

"The gale has stirred them up, and they are flying for the light!" cried Larry at the top of his voice.

Whack! and a big gander came plump against the woolly head of Lem causing him to stagger forward.

"Hole on dar!" cried Lem, catching at the railing to sustain himself. "Who dat hit me?"

Larry laughed in spite of himself.

Lem saw the grin on his face and instantly knew that a goose had hit him.

But the blow was death to the goose, for he was found dead where Lem had been standing. Lem picked him up and guessed his weight at ten pounds.

"Tank de Lor' yer broke yer cle neck," he muttered. "Nuffin but er ole fool goose 'd eber fly agin er nigger's head. Sarbs yer right," and he put his hand to the back of his head to feel the extent of the damage, when another came plump against his face.

He went over like a circus performer giving a backward somersault.

Larry roared, and Lem yelled with all his might:

"Lef go dar! Hole on, I tole yer! Lemme up! Lor' gorramitey!"

He scrambled to his feet, the blood streaming from his battered nose, and made a dive for the stairway that led to the room below.

Two more struck the balcony a moment later, and Larry said to himself:

"I guess I'd better go down too, or I'll get knocked over. They may come pretty fast after awhile. This light is a new thing to them," and he quickly followed the faithful black down the stairs.

But he stopped at the foot of the stairs and seated himself there to watch the light. He knew the glass was an inch thick, yet a heavy thump of a ten pound goose might break it, and in that case he must be ready to put in another and relight the lamps.

He had been seated there five minutes ere several geese fell fluttering down upon him, having struck the framework and dropped down the open stairway.

"We'll have geese enough to send to market to-morrow morning," he said, "if there was only a market within reach of us. Lem can get feathers enough, however, to pay him for those knockdowns," and again he was compelled to laugh at the old ducky as he went over backward, yelling as though a tiger had seized him.

A few minutes later a half dozen ducks tumbled down upon him.

"They are coming fast," he said, kicking them out of the way.

"All the water fowls are on the wing—blown off their roosts. Hello! There come some of Mother Cary's chickens. I wonder what will come next. Hope it won't blow any sharks out of the water."

Hour after hour passed and still the storm raged. Geese and ducks kept dropping down into the open stairway, till at least half a hundred were piled up there. Lem came in, his nose swelled considerably, and looked at the pile.

A broad grin illumined his ebony face. He would have his revenge. He would have a big bag of feathers by the time the next boat came with supplies for the lighthouse.

"Dem geese an' ducks am all wrecked, Marse Larry," he remarked, as he gazed around at the dead fowls.

"Yes—if we had easy communication with a market we could make a fortune on ducks and geese."

"Yes, sah—dat's er fac'," and he commenced clearing the place of the dead fowls.

But the storm continued to rage till near daylight, and the wild roar of the waves was fearful. Ducks and geese continued to kill themselves against the light until there were nearly two hundred lying around.

The storm suddenly ceased and the wild, fierce wind died away. But the roar of the angry ocean was heard for hours after.

When daylight came the sky was bright and clear—not a cloud to be seen anywhere; only the high rolling waves beating over the reef and against the massive walls of the lighthouse indicating that there had been a storm.

CHAPTER V.

THE HARVEST OF GAME.

Just as the sun was peeping over the everglades Anita Narcissa came tripping up to the balcony, where Larry was engaged extinguishing the lamps. She looked bright and cheerful, though very poorly dressed—having had nothing saved from the wreck of the Navarro—and gazed in unfeigned surprise at the dead ducks, geese, and sea-gulls that were thickly strewn over the floor.

"Why, Mr. Leel" she exclaimed. "What in the world are you going to do with so many ducks and geese?"

"Throw them into the sea as soon as Lem plucks them of their feathers," he replied.

"How did you kill them?"

"I never killed one of them, Miss Narcissa," he replied. "Every fowl you see there is a suicide."

"A suicide?"

"Yes—they killed themselves."

She looked at him.

"I don't understand," she remarked, looking him full in the face.

"I will explain in a few words. There was a great storm last night. Did you hear it?"

"Yes."

"The lamps were lit for the first time last night."

"Yes."

"The wind blew the fowls from their rest, and in the darkness they flew at the light. It blinded them so that they knew not when they reached it till they struck it. Of course everyone that struck it was killed. One struck me on the back of my head and knocked me down. Another mashed Lem's nose all over his face, and sent him a complete somersault backwards. He got up, said he had nothing against the geese, and went downstairs in disgust. He hasn't been up since."

She could not help smiling at his description of Lem's retreat, and said:

"Why, I never heard of such things before. Is it a common occurrence?"

"Oh, yes. I've known sea-fowls, ducks and geese to strike old Tybee Light on a still summer night."

"I am sorry Lem was hurt. Maybe he is too ill to get up this morning?"

"Oh, no. He is all right."

"Have you seen him this morning?"

"No, but I have heard him."

"These ducks are good to eat, are they not?"

"Oh, yes. Lem will cook a brace of them to-day for our dinner. If there had been a clear space at the base he would probably have found a thousand there this morning, but the sea washed them away."

"Oh, I wish I could have seen the storm. I heard it last night, but I was afraid to get up."

"You could not have seen much if you had. It was too dark, and some ungallant old goose would have knocked you over the railings into the sea."

"I thought I heard a wild shriek in the early part of the night, before the storm became so furious."

"The wind would sometimes shriek like a demon."

"But I heard it only once. It must have been a human voice."

"You were quite nervous last night, were you not?"

"Yes, I confess that I was."

"Well, your nervous fears may have made you think it was a human voice that shrieked."

"Something surely made me think so," she said, "for it made me shudder when I heard it. It rings in my ears yet."

Lem's whistle announced breakfast, and Larry led her down into the little dining room, where tea, bread, cheese and duck awaited them.

"How is your nose, Lem?" Larry asked, on entering the dining room.

"Dat nose am all right, Marse Larry," said faithful Lem.

"I see it's still on your face," said Larry, laughing. "I hope it won't grow out in the shape of a goose."

"Dat ain't no goose nose," replied Lem. "It kin smell a goose cookin' a mile off, Marse Larry."

"I believe you there, Lem," and Larry and Anita both laughed as they seated themselves at the table, "for if a man ever loved roast goose you do."

"Dat's er fac'," assented Lem; and he grinned broadly at the thought of the feasts of roast goose he would have for three or four days to come.

After breakfast Larry went down to see if he could find any traces of the two men who had been cast into the sea the night before.

Of course he could see nothing of them, but he believed that both were drowned.

"The fall would kill one, and the other must have drowned," he said to himself, "so they are done for at least."

Returning to the top of the lighthouse, he took the spyglass and looked along the white beach in search of the bodies of Captain Blake and his man.

He saw nothing of them, and so he glanced down the lower beach at the wreckers' huts. The wreckers were standing in a group at the upper end of one of the huts, talking and gesticulating quite excitedly.

"Great Heavens!" he ejaculated, "that must be Blake!"

He gazed long and eagerly at the little group, and noticed the man he took to be Blake slip away and enter the hut. The others soon followed, and then they were all out of sight.

"How in the world did he escape last night?" Larry asked himself a dozen times. "He fell eighty feet into the water, which was enough to kill any ordinary man, unless he struck the water feet foremost. How did he miss striking the rocks? I don't understand it."

He called Lem up, and asked:

"Would you know the men who came here last night?"

"No, sah; it was too dark."

"I thought I recognized the man I threw over the balcony standing by those huts down there this morning."

"Bress de Lor! Dat war his ghost, Marse Larry."

"I don't think it was any ghost, Lem. I can tell full well a live man from a ghost. It was that Captain Blake I fought with last night."

"But, Marse Larry, dat fall would kill de debbil!" exclaimed Lem.

"Not if he missed the rocks and struck the water feet foremost."

"Wish he'd broke him neck," growled Lem, looking over toward the huts on the lower beach.

They went to work to remove the ducks and geese and clean up the upper part of the lighthouse. Lem gathered up the fowls, carried them below, and picked feathers all day long, except when he stopped to look at the brace of ducks in the oven.

Just before sunset a boat pushed off from the huts and pulled for the lighthouse. There were seven men in it.

"Close up below, Lem!" cried Larry, and in a minute the faithful old black had the massive door bolted and barred.

He then went up to see what the trouble was.

Larry pointed to the boat coming in, and Lem shook his head.

Anita came up and asked:

"What are those men in the boat coming after?"

"They are wreckers—bad men," replied Larry. "I will not admit them. They can't get in, so you need not get excited in the least." The boat came and touched at the base of the lighthouse.

"Hello, mate!" cried one of the party.

"Hello, yourself!" returned Larry. "What do you want?"

"Come down and let us in," answered the leader. "We want to see you."

"There are two many of you," replied Larry. "Only one at a time will be admitted hereafter."

"We merely want to talk with you."

"Talk away, I can hear every word you say."

They consulted a moment and then the leader asked.

"What's the matter? Why won't you let us in?"

"Simply because I know who and what you are. Sheer off now or I'll fire on you."

"What for?"

"Because you are here without my consent. In the name of the United States I command you to leave at once."

His tone and language startled the wreckers; but there was no other recourse for them, and they retired to their boat again and shoved off.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WRECKERS AT WORK.

LET us now go to the wreckers' huts, on the beach below the lighthouse, and note events on the evening of the storm.

It will be remembered by the reader that the occupants of those huts claimed to be fishermen; but the quick mind of young Larry saw that fishing was only a blind—that fish caught in that out-of-the-way place could never reach a market except as salt-cured.

The visit of old Sancho to the lighthouse, and the revelations he made to Larry, confirmed him in his suspicions in regard to their calling.

When Captain Blake, as the leader of the wreckers was called, and two of his companions paid a visit to the lighthouse, it was for the purpose of mentally measuring the young lighthouse keeper, and ascertaining the time the light would be put on. On learning that it was not until the Thursday following, they went away to consult about what they would do.

In one of these huts nine stalwart, bronzed men gathered that evening on Blake's return from the Manatee Lighthouse, lit their pipes, and listened to the report of their leader.

"He is a young man," said Blake, in speaking of young Lee, "who knows his business. He was born in the old Tybee Lighthouse, and knows all about such things."

"How many people are with him?" one of the party asked.

"One old negro man, who seems to be his cook and housekeeper. He will ruin our business, and force us to leave this part of the coast, if he puts up the light. It can be seen twenty miles out, and that would warn away every vessel that passed. I think three of us could go over there, tie up him and the negro, and then smash the lamps or throw them into the sea. It would take the Government three or six months to put it in working order again, during which time we can continue to work the decoys during storms."

"But how long would it take the Government to hang us for doing that thing?" one of the wreckers asked.

"Wreckers never ask such questions," was the reply. "We have done enough to be hanged a dozen times, and should not stop at putting two men out of our way. Who will remain to accuse us? The lighthouse keeper and his nigger will be dead."

"That's so," added one of the party. "We can put them out of the way, and no one will know who did it. If any of us are arrested we can swear each other out."

"That's the idea," said Blake. "If we stand by each other the Government can do nothing with us. We must throw the lamps and the two men into the sea."

"Yes—that's so."

"Of course it is. We'll have no more wrecks if once that light is going."

"That's so. We'd have to give up and move away."

"We'll go over on Wednesday night and do the work," said Blake. "Then he won't light up on Thursday night. The Government will not know anything about it for many weeks."

"How would it do to take the light ourselves, run it on fair nights, but put it out on stormy nights?" one of the party asked.

"It wouldn't do at all," answered Blake. "The Government would then be sure to catch us, and we'd swing from the yardarm of some ship in the navy yard. No; we must get rid of them, and let the lighthouse stand alone and in darkness."

It was finally decided to put their plans into execution on Wednesday evening—the day before the time set by the Government to open the lighthouse.

But while man proposes God disposes. A storm came up on Tuesday evening, and seeing several sails in sight, young Larry Lee con-

cluded that it was his duty, under the circumstances, to anticipate the Government by two days, and so he lit the lamps just before sunset.

The flash of the great light over the water in the gathering twilight astounded the wreckers, who had been eagerly watching the approach of the coming storm all the afternoon. They had even been gazing at the sails in the distance from the tops of their huts, perhaps mentally calculating the value of the expected wrecks.

"Great whales!" ejaculated one of the wreckers, "just look at that light!"

Blake gazed at the great light in unfeigned surprise.

His face changed color and his eyes flashed fire.

"He has no right to light up before Thursday," he hissed through his clenched teeth. "He is going beyond his instructions, and is altogether too officious."

"It will ruin our business to-night," remarked another.

"So it will," assented a third.

"Two of you get the boat," said Blake, quietly. "It is death to him or ruin to us. We'll soon see which it is."

"But we can't get there now," said one of the wreckers.

"We must get there," said Blake, with startling emphasis.

The boat was soon drawn down to the beach, where half a dozen men held it till Blake and two of his comrades could get in and wait for another wave to come in and give them a chance to ride out on it.

Blake armed himself with a murderous-looking knife, as did Kennedy, one of the two, and there was a look of determination in his face that told of desperation within his heart.

"Now let go!" he cried, as a huge wave came in and lifted the boat above the sand.

They seized their oars and made a desperate pull as the others released their hold, and the boat went out with the receding wave into deeper water.

It was a desperate undertaking, but the light guided them; the boat was a good one, and the men strong and well used to buffeting the waves.

"Pull hard, men!" cried Blake, and all three laid themselves to the task as men seldom worked. The waves were coming higher every minute. If they could only reach the lighthouse they could put out the light and remain till the storm had done its worst.

Pull—pull—pull, and at last they succeeded in striking the east side of the lighthouse, where the force of the waves was broken, and were able to effect a landing without much difficulty.

"Stay here and hold the boat, Saggars," said Blake, "till we come down again," and he and Kennedy went around to the one door at the base of the tall stone tower.

Just as they reached the door old Lem opened it and peered out into the darkness.

They pounced upon him.

Kennedy grasped him from behind, and, thinking he was well able to handle the black cook, cried out to Blake to go up and attend to Larry.

Blake sprang away and ran nimbly up the stone steps, leaving Kennedy to struggle alone with old Lem.

Kennedy, as the reader already knows, never made a greater mistake in his life than when he undertook to get away with old Lem.

Seeing his danger, he promptly turned the tables on his assailant, knocked him down, and threw him into the sea—almost into the boat that Saggars was holding, and then rushed upstairs to the assistance of Larry.

He reached the top in time to see young Larry hurl Blake over the balcony into the raging depths eighty feet below.

Down, down he went until the wrecker struck the water feet foremost. Two feet nearer the base of the lighthouse and he would have been crushed to a shapeless mass on a rock.

As it was, he rose to the surface unharmed to any great extent, and called out:

"Saggars! Saggars!" loud enough to be heard above the roar of the waves.

Just then Kennedy struck the boat and climbed into it.

Saggars, who heard Blake calling him, thought he was the young lighthouse keeper whom Blake had thrown over into the sea. He thought Kennedy was the negro, and was about to brain him with an oar when he recognized his voice.

"Saggars! Saggars! help me!" cried Blake again.

Kennedy heard and recognized the voice, and thrust out an oar. Blake grasped it and was soon in the boat.

"My God, Blake!" exclaimed Kennedy, "how came you here?"

"He threw me over the balcony," replied Blake. "What are you doing here?"

"He threw me into the sea," was the reply.

For a couple of minutes only the roar of the sea was heard. Then Blake cried out:

"We can do nothing more to-night. We must save ourselves if we can, and try it some other time."

Seizing their oars they made a shove, and the waves carried them away from the lighthouse toward the beach with race-horse speed.

CHAPTER VII.

CAST UP BY THE WAVES.

THE waves had increased in volume and fury since they left the beach, and the desperate wreckers found themselves in the grasp of the very elements that had been aiding them in plundering unfortunates who had been wrecked on the treacherous reefs.

There was one chance only for them, and that was in the fact that each wave carried them nearer and nearer the low, sandy beach, where there were no rocks for them to be broken upon. They knew this, and, instead of rowing forward, they used all their skill to keep it afloat, trusting to the wind and the waves to land them safely on *terra firma*.

When within two hundred yards of the beach a huge wave lifted the boat high up and threw it into the trough of the sea, bottom upwards.

The wretches struggled solely to keep their heads above the water and let the waves carry them to land.

Wave after wave came and hurled them about with pitiless force.

At last they were pitched up on the beach, unconscious, and more dead than alive. The boat was also thrown high up on the sand.

Kennedy was the first to recover consciousness. He sprang up and glared around him in the darkness. He could not see twenty feet away. The rain was coming down in torrents. A faint glimmer of light through the cracks of one of the huts over a mile below told him where he was.

He ran with all his might, though feeling deathly sick from having swallowed nearly a gallon of sea water, but sick as he was, he ran all the way till he reached the nearest hut, the one with the light in it.

Seven wreckers were in the hut, awaiting the return of their comrades. Kennedy burst in upon them with:

"Quick! Get your lanterns! Blake and Saggars are on the beach somewhere!"

The astounded wreckers ran to the door and looked out at the still brilliant glare of Manatee Lighthouse.

"You couldn't reach the lighthouse?" one of them asked.

"Yes—and we were fired out into the sea. Blake was thrown over the balcony. Come, quick, or it may be too late!"

By the time he was through telling of the reception the expedition had received at the lighthouse, four lanterns were ready, and the hardy villains went out into the pelting storm to search along the beach for Blake and Saggars.

Saggars was soon found lying where the waves had cast him. Two of the wreckers took him up and carried him back to the hut, whilst the others went in search of Blake.

They soon found him.

He had crawled further inland out of reach of the waves, and was trying to disgorge some of the sea water he had involuntarily swallowed.

"Here he is!" cried Kennedy, but the roar of the waves drowned his voice. He had to wave his lantern above his head to signal the others that he had found him.

They soon gathered around him.

"You are all right, cap'en?" one of the party asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Where are the others?"

"Here's Kennedy, and Saggars has been carried to the hut."

Blake was assisted to his feet and led back to the hut.

On the way back he glared at the Manatee Light and hissed through clenched teeth:

"You have triumphed this time, Larry Lee, but Edson Blake never lets up when once he has started after a man. Your time will come when my experience to-night will be a pleasant one in comparison."

At the hut they found that Saggars had been restored to consciousness, but he was awfully sick from the quantity of water swallowed.

The boat was also found upon the beach near where Saggars had been picked up.

Thus were the wreckers defeated in their attempt to extinguish the Manatee Light, and on that awful night several vessels were saved from wreck by means of the warning given by the light.

"We won't get any wrecks by this gale," said Kennedy, after taking a drink of brandy to take the chill out of him, "so we may as well go to bed and wait till we can put out that light."

"But won't Lee have you and Blake arrested for this night's work?" one of the party asked.

"We can keep a watch on the lighthouse," said Blake, "and if he or the nigger leaves it, we can make fish bait of them. I'm not afraid of arrest."

They all went to bed, to rise in the morning, only to find dead ducks and geese strewn along the beach, having been killed by contact with the lighthouse. There were scores and scores of them, but not a sign of a wreck. The Manatee Light had done its work well, and the villains made the morning air sulphurous with their oaths.

"Our business will be ruined," said Kennedy, "unless we can put out that light."

"We must put it out," said Blake. "This is about the only place where we can do a good business on the reefs. Once out, it will be six months before they put it in order again. That's the way all government works are run."

"Why didn't you put it out last night, cap'en?" one of the party asked.

"Because I was thrown over the balcony into the sea," was the frank admission of the leader.

"But why didn't you throw him over?"

"Because I couldn't. When he is thrown over, it will be done by two men, not one."

"And you want four men to put that nigger out," said Kennedy, at which the others indulged in a laugh at his expense.

"Just have your laugh now, pards," said Blake, "for you won't have any when you tackle that nigger. I've had hold of him, and know what he is."

The laugh subsided, and the wreckers gathered up the dead fowls and buried them. Then they held a council to devise ways and means to put out the light.

"Seven of you must go over there this afternoon," said Blake, "and try to gain admittance. Once inside you can do your work with ease. Shoot them down, smash the lamps and throw them into the sea."

"You won't go yourself?" Saggars asked.

"No. If he saw me returning with half a dozen friends he would not be fool enough to admit us. If he doesn't see either Kennedy or me in the crowd, he might let you in. Then your work will be easy."

"That's so, mates," said one of the party, an old man who had been a sailor in his younger days.

"Then you had better make ready to go over as soon as the sea gets smoothed down again," suggested Blake.

"I think so, too," added Kennedy. "But do you know, I think he is looking at us now through a glass."

"No."

"Well, he is."

"Then I will go inside and not let him know that I am still alive," and Blake hastily re-entered the hut and shut the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS FACE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE WINDOW.

THE reader will remember the reception the seven wreckers met with at the lighthouse. Larry refused to admit them, and ordered them off in very peremptory terms.

They retired, of course, because they could not do otherwise.

On their way back they looked up and saw the dark, sweet face of Anita Narcissa at a window.

"By the great deep!" cried one of the men, "there's a young woman in there."

"Yes," said another, looking up at her through a spyglass, "and I've seen that face before."

"Where—where?" several asked at once.

"Look at her and see if you ever saw her before," said the man, passing the glass to the one on his right.

The wrecker took the glass and pointed it at her.

He turned ashen pale and gasped:

"My God! It's the face of the young girl old Sancho buried in the swamp!"

"No!" ejaculated the others in a breath, their faces paling at the mention of the young girl.

"Yes," said the first man. "It's either her or her ghost. Look for yourselves."

Anita stood at the window and gazed at the boat, as though they were something new to her. The others took the glass and gazed at her, and each man recognized her face. They were so sure that old Sancho had buried her in the swamp that they insisted upon it that it was the ghost of the young girl.

Their faces were serious, and they pulled at the oars as if anxious to get as far away as possible from the lighthouse.

It was too dark for Blake to be recognized from the lighthouse when they reached the beach, so he met them at the beach when they landed.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as they landed, seeing the serious expression of their faces.

"We couldn't get in," replied Saggars.

"What did he say?"

"He said he knew all about us, and wanted nothing to do with us, and ordered us away."

"And who do you think we saw there?" one of the party asked.

"I don't know—Kennedy's nigger was there, I guess."

"Yes, and your white man," retorted Kennedy.

"Well, we saw the ghost of the young girl that was buried in the swamp five months ago."

"The dence?"

"Yes—we all saw her as plainly as we see you now."

"Then old Sancho didn't bury her, and she wasn't dead," replied Blake, who was too well advanced in worldly knowledge to believe in such things as ghosts.

"But she was dead," said the others, "for we saw her with our own eyes, and know that she was dead."

"Yes," added Kennedy. "I don't know as much as you do, captain, but I know a dead person when I see one."

"Ay! so do I," exclaimed four or five at once.

"Then it was not her face you saw. There is no such things as ghosts in this world."

"You may call it what you please," said Saggars. "I saw the dead girl, and that was her face to-night in the window of the lighthouse."

"Ay, ay! you are right, mate!"

Blake was puzzled.

How did a young woman get into the lighthouse? There was no woman there on the occasion of his first visit there.

"I can't understand it," he muttered to himself. "There was no woman there when he came, for I saw him land there from the steamer. No other vessels have been here since. Where, then, could she have come from? That girl that Sancho carried into the swamp to bury was dead, for I saw her myself. I must look into this and see what I can find out. There's a mystery about it somewhere."

That night the wreckers sat round the fire in one of the huts, smoking their pipes and discussing the mystery of that young girl's presence in the Manatee Lighthouse.

"We'll go and see old Sancho in the swamp to-morrow morning," said Kennedy, "and make him show us where he buried her."

"Yes—that's the idea. I can swear to having seen her face to-day."

"So can I. If she is dead, then we have seen her ghost."

"How natural for her ghost to visit a lighthouse which was put up to prevent shipwrecks," remarked Saggars.

"Don't be a fool, Saggars," said Blake, annoyed at the direction of their superstitious fears.

"Of course not. I am no fool. Do you doubt that we saw her this evening?"

"I believe you saw some one who looks like her. If she is dead and was buried, you didn't see her, but some one else. That's what I mean."

That was a poser for the wreckers.

If she died and was buried, then it was somebody else they saw, not her. That seemed reasonable. Yet they were ignorant and super-

stitious, and had always believed in such things as ghosts and other supernatural apparitions.

They went to bed at a late hour and pondered over the situation till they finally fell asleep, to dream of the mysterious young girl. Some of them dreamed that she followed them, pointing an accusing finger at them, till they started up with yells of terror.

But morning came at last, and two of the wreckers—Kennedy and Blake—started out to visit old Sancho in his home in the swamp.

They knew that his cabin was on a little island some distance in the interior of the swamp, but had no idea of the difficulty they would have in reaching it.

It took them at least two hours to find it.

Old Sancho heard his dogs barking, and went to the edge of the island to see who it was. To his surprise he saw the two wreckers making for his cabin.

The wreckers had murdered his son, and now he feared the worst for himself and his old wife.

Running back into the cabin, he cautioned his old wife to pretend utter ignorance of any young white girl ever having been on the island. He then armed himself with a huge knife, and awaited their coming.

"Hello, Sancho!" greeted Blake, as he and Kennedy came up to the cabin door.

"How do, marsa," he responded.

"Sancho, come out here. I want to see you," said Blake.

The old negro grasped his knife resolutely and came out.

"What youse want wid me, marsa?" he asked.

"I want to know where you buried that young girl, Sancho."

"Ober dere in de lagoon, marsa," he replied, pointing to a sluggish pond of water on the south side of the little island.

"Why, you said you buried her, Sancho," said Blake, looking at him sternly.

"De water 'd come inter any hole, marsa; so I frowed her in dere, an' de 'gaters eat her up right away. Ugh! Dey tore her up in no time!" And he gave a shudder of horror that fully convinced Blake and Kennedy that he was telling the truth.

"Come and show us the place, Sancho," said Blake, and the wily old negro led the way to a spot on the edge of the lagoon, where a huge alligator was sleeping in the sunshine.

"Heah's de place," he said. "I frowed her in dere, an' dat ole 'gater dar help eat her, suah."

The huge alligator swam lazily away, and the two villainous whites stood there and gazed upon the spot as if trying to recall the horrors of the scene they believed had once occurred there.

"What do you think of it, Kennedy?" Blake asked, turning to his companion.

"I believe he is telling the truth," replied Kennedy.

"So do I."

"Ob course I am. Who says I ain't?" exclaimed old Sancho.

"Some of our men say they saw her at the lighthouse last night, or her ghost," replied Kennedy.

"Bress de Lor!" fervently exclaimed the old negro, crossing himself with religious fervency; "dat am her ghost. She comes heah an' calls me ebery night, an' tells me de 'gaters an' de debbil am er waitin' fo' me, ugh!"

Kennedy and Blake exchanged significant glances. Blake touched his forehead, shook his head, and then turned away.

Kennedy followed, leaving old Sancho standing by the side of the lagoon, gazing after them with a puzzled expression on his black countenance.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORM—A WRECK ON THE REEFS.

BLAKE and Kennedy returned to their huts to report to the others.

"The girl is dead and was thrown to the alligators by old Sancho," said Blake, "so it was not her you saw at the lighthouse."

"We knew that before, capen," said Saggars. "We knowed it was her ghost, 'cause we saw her dead ourselves."

"Did old Sancho say he had ever seen her ghost?" one of the men asked.

"No," replied Blake, promptly, not giving Kennedy a chance to tell the truth about it, "and he lives within twenty fathoms of the spot where the alligators devoured her."

Blake glanced at Kennedy in a manner that demanded that he should indorse the lie, and Kennedy adited:

"Yes, that's so."

The wreckers glanced at each other, and seemed puzzled what to think about it. Nothing could shake their faith in what they had seen.

"There may be another who looks just like her," said Kennedy after a pause. "Such things often happen, you know."

"I've heard of such things," said one, "but never knew of any."

"That's just what it is," added Blake, anxious to break down the idea that it was her ghost they had seen, as he knew he could never get them to go near the lighthouse again as long as they believed it, "and I'll prove it to you some day."

"How will you do that?"

"Show you the girl or woman," he answered.

"Then we will believe it," remarked one, "and not before."

"Well, don't say anything to old Sancho about it," he cautioned, "till I have had a chance to produce the woman."

He knew that Sancho would confirm their belief that it was the ghost of the murdered girl they had seen—the very thing he wanted to avoid.

They promised to keep the matter quiet, and Blake in turn promised to get up a disguise and visit the lighthouse, and see if any woman was there.

They went outside, and one of them turned a spyglass at the lighthouse.

"There she is now!" he exclaimed, and every man made a rush for the glass. Blake got it, and looked at Larry and Anita, as they stood side by side on the balcony of the lighthouse.

"Yes," he said, after taking a good look at the young couple, "and she is a real live young woman—or girl. The man that would take her for a ghost would take his grandmother for the Goddess of Liberty."

The others looked, and gradually came to the conclusion that the young girl, whoever she was, did not act like a ghost at all.

"She is no ghost," remarked Kennedy, "but as near as I can judge she looks very much like the young girl who was buried in the swamp."

"So I think," said Blake, "but that is only a resemblance. Of course it can't be her."

"Oh, no, of course not."

The party then went fishing for the purpose of passing away time—all but Blake.

He had a plan to mature and put into execution, by which he hoped to land himself into the lighthouse, and thus have a chance to shoot down Larry Lee and extinguish Manatee Light.

"Ah!" he muttered, "I have it now. I will disguise myself and pay him a visit; see who the woman is, and then make short work of him with a revolver. That will be the easiest way."

But he would have to go to Key West to get his disguise—maybe to Havana, but he would go there.

He called a council next day and told the wreckers what he would do. They agreed with him that it would be the best plan for him to adopt, and he only waited for the opportunity to get off to Key West or Havana.

In the meantime one of the wreckers had met old Sancho, and the wily old negro at once began to tell a horrible story about the ghost of the young girl hovering around his cabin nearly every night.

It made their hair stand on end, and, of course, confirmed all their superstitious fears.

A few days after this another storm came up very suddenly, sweeping in from the sea with terrific force.

The waves came with booms that exceeded the roar of a thousand pieces of artillery.

The storm reached its height at noon, and young Larry Lee and Anita Narcissa beheld it from the balcony of the lighthouse.

From that elevated position young Lee could see a small schooner struggling helplessly in the trough of the sea, her masts gone by the board, and the hull in danger of going down every moment.

"Oh, my God!" groaned Larry, "I can give them no assistance. No boat could live a moment in such a sea as that."

"They will all be drowned," said Anita, who was standing by his side.

"I am afraid they will," he replied. "The wind and the waves will carry them on the reefs in a few minutes. God help them when they strike them!"

On came the ill-fated schooner. Suddenly it seemed to take a turn. The wind veered around two or three points, and the helpless wreck started direct for the base of the lighthouse.

"Oh, mercy!" cried the young girl, her face paling. "It is coming here. The shock will kill us all!"

"By no means," said Larry. "It will strike the reef some fifty feet from the base. Ah! There it is now."

The doomed vessel struck the solid rock with a crash that was heard above the roar of the elements.

"Stay here," cried Larry to Anita, "and Lem and I will go down and see if we can render any assistance," and he dashed down the stone stairs, calling to Lem to follow him.

The faithful negro followed, and in another minute they were down at the bottom, where the angry waves dashed high upon the walls.

Just as they opened the lower door a huge wave dashed an old sailor straight into it, knocking him senseless against the stone wall on the other side of the room.

"Help here, Lem!" cried Larry, running waist deep into the water and lifting up the sailor in his arms.

Lem took him and ran up the steps and laid him where the water could not reach him. Then he came back to see if any more unfortunates needed assistance. Two more bodies fell against the lighthouse, but they fell back into the water and the sea swallowed them up.

That was all they saw. There might have been more.

"We can do no more," said Larry, and then they put forth all their strength and closed the door, but ere they could fasten it the waves dashed it open again.

Larry motioned to Lem to follow him and then led the way upstairs. They took up the sailor and carried him up to a room, where they did hard work to restore consciousness.

He soon showed signs of life, and then they redoubled their efforts.

"Ah! he'll come to all right, Lem," cried Larry, rubbing away vigorously.

The sailor commenced vomiting the sea water he had swallowed, and then he felt better.

"Bring some brandy, Lem," ordered Larry. "That will warm him up and put new life into him."

Lem got the brandy, and, drawing the cork, put the bottle to the sailor's mouth. The old salt took a strong pull at it, and then smacked his lips over it with supreme satisfaction.

"He's all right now; watch him, Lem," and Larry ran up to the balcony to overlook the wreck.

He found Anita leaning over the balcony, gazing down at the doomed vessel, and watching wave after wave sweep completely over it.

The wind kept veering round till it blew almost in an opposite direction, thus checking the fury of the waves and calming the tempest. The clouds broke and the clear sunshine illumined the scene.

The storm soon ended, and the waves began to subside. The wreck remained perched upon the reef at the base of the lighthouse, terribly wrenched, but with her cargo all inside of her.

Ere sunset the waves had so far subsided that Lem was able to board the wreck and search for more people. None could be found.

The old sailor had so far recovered as to be able to give an account of himself.

"'Twas the schooner Leonidas, bound from New Orleans to New York," he said, "with a cargo of sugars, wines and liquors. Where am I?"

"In the Manatee Lighthouse, where the schooner struck."

"Anybody else saved?" he asked.

"No—you are the only one, I think."

"That's bad—but it was a terrible blow. Give me another glass of grog, mate."

Larry gave him another drink of the brandy, and then the tears coursed down his bronzed face.

"A boat is coming off from the shore, Mr. Lee," cried Anita, running down from the balcony.

"What!" exclaimed Larry, gazing up at her.

"A boat with seven men in it is coming out from the shore," she repeated.

"The wreckers!" he exclaimed. "Get the rifles, Lem. That means a fight," and he hurried up to the balcony with the young girl.

CHAPTER X.

THE WRECKERS BAFFLED.

On reaching the balcony, Larry took the spyglass and leveled it at the boat with seven men in it. It was coming direct for the lighthouse.

"They're wreckers, coming to plunder the wreck," he said to Anita, who was standing by his side.

"What will they do?" she asked.

"They will try to plunder the cargo, and kill anybody that stands in their way. But I don't think they will succeed in this case."

Lem came up with the two rifles, and Larry said to him:

"Light the lamps, Lem. Miss Narcissa, please go below. There may be shots exchanged, and you will be in danger."

"I would rather stay if you will allow me," she said.

"I cannot allow you to be exposed to any unnecessary danger," and with that he took her by the hand and led her to the stairs.

She smiled, and passed down the stone steps to the little room that had been assigned her.

Then he turned and assisted Lem to light the lamps. In a few minutes every lamp was lit, and the great reflectors sent their rays many miles out to sea, as the setting sun sank down in the deep bosom of the Gulf of Mexico.

Then Larry and Lem took their rifles and stood on the balcony facing the shore, watching the boat full of wreckers.

When the boat was within hailing distance, Larry cried out:

"Ahoy, there! What do you want here?"

"We want to help you with the wreck," was the reply.

"We don't want any help," said Larry, "so you better stand off."

"Do you mean to say that you will not allow us to aid sailors in distress?"

"Oh, no. There is but one sailor in distress, and he is inside here being well cared for. The others were drowned. The cargo is in the hold of the schooner yet, unharmed except the sugar; that you shall not touch."

"You want it yourself, eh?"

"No; I will keep it for the owners."

"We have as much right to that as you have," they replied.

"Well, if you really think so, you had better see about it. I will shoot if you come any nearer. You have your choice."

The men in the boat seemed to be undecided, as they appeared to be consulting among themselves for some time.

"He can shoot us from behind the window," said Kennedy.

"And the black can shoot, too," added another.

"And we have nothing but knives and revolvers," said a third.

"Let's go back and wait till midnight," suggested a fourth, and it was promptly agreed to.

They took up oars again and pulled away.

"You have more sense than I gave you credit for!" Larry called out as they stood off.

"Don't put us down as fools, young man!" cried Kennedy. "We'll attend to you yet."

"Come over at any time," said Larry, cheerfully. "You won't catch me napping."

They made no reply, but pulled away and returned to the beach, where they relieved themselves by swearing at the young lighthouse keeper who had so effectually baffled them.

Here was a cargo lodged on the reefs within easy distance of them, and yet he and his black servant had kept them away.

"Ten thousand maledictions on his head!" hissed Kennedy, who was in command of the wreckers in Captain Blake's absence.

"We ought to get a cannon and batter down the lighthouse," remarked Sagers.

"If we don't do something to get rid of him we will have to leave this coast."

"Yes, and that very soon."

"He dares not come ashore in his boat."

"No—of course not."

"Hello! There goes a canoe towards the lighthouse!" cried one of the men, looking northward through the gathering twilight.

The others gazed in the direction indicated, and saw old Sancho pushing for the lighthouse as fast as his canoe could carry him.

"What in Belezub's name does that old nigger want at the lighthouse?" exclaimed Kennedy.

"He means to give us away, I reckon," said another. "He knows all, but has soured on us ever since we killed his boy."

"Then we must stop him! He must not go there to-night! He will warn Lee of our game! Back to the boat! We must run him down and give him to the sharks!"

With a hurrah the seven wreckers rushed back to the boat, pushed it back into the water, sprang in, seized the oars, and pulled away with all their might.

They sent the boat flying through the water, and made a rapid gain toward heading off the old negro.

Sancho saw them coming, and at once realized his danger. He knew that certain death would be the result of his capture if they suspected him enough to warrant a pursuit. His safety lay in reaching the lighthouse before they could overtake him.

He bent himself to his oars, and pulled hard. What the old black didn't know about rowing no sailor ever did.

But one man pulling against seven is hard work.

"Ahoy there, Sancho!" cried Kennedy, as they came within hailing distance of the canoe.

"What youse want?" demanded Sancho.

"Where are you going?"

"To de lighthouse," he replied.

"What for?"

"After medison for de ole 'oman," he answered.

"Come back and we'll give you all the medicine you want."

"Can't do it, marsa; yer medison done gone an' killed me boy," and he pulled away with all his strength, sending the canoe skimming over the water like a thing of life.

"Sancho, if you don't come back we'll sink you to the bottom!" cried Kennedy.

"Better lef me be, marsa!" cried Sancho, in very determined tones.

"Pull hard, men," said Kennedy. "That old rascal means mischief. It's time we sent him to Davy Jones! Pull away, my hearties!"

They did pull, and the boat shot through the water with the speed of a race horse.

In a few minutes they were again within hailing distance of the lighthouse, and, fearing the old negro would escape them, the wreckers commenced firing at him with their revolvers.

"Hi, dar!" screamed old Sancho. "What for yer shootin' me? Hi, dar, I tole yer! Lef me be! Whoop, Marsa Leel!"

Larry was on the lookout on the balcony of the lighthouse, rifle in hand. He raised the weapon to his shoulder, took deliberate aim at the foremost man in the boat, and fired.

The man clapped his hand to his hip and sat down.

"That got him," said Larry, "but the distance is too great to do much harm. Give me the other gun, Lem, and reload this one. I'll give them a taste of what they may expect when they get nearer."

He took the other rifle and took aim a second time and fired.

Another wrecker was hit, and then they dared not come any nearer. Old Sancho pulled through and reached the lighthouse, and the baffled wreckers hauled off, venting their rage in curses loud and deep.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE IN THE SWAMP.

"PULL straight for the swamp up there!" cried Kennedy. "We'll show the old rascal what it is to go back on us. We'll burn his hut and his old woman in it."

"Ayl and the old rascal, too, when we catch him," and they pulled away with all their might, leaving old Sancho to land at his leisure at the lighthouse.

"Dat yer, old man?" Lem asked, before opening the door for him.

"Yes, dis am me."

"Come in den."

Sancho walked in as dignified as if he owned the lighthouse.

"You made a narrow escape, old man," said Larry, grasping his hand as he came up the stairs.

"Yes, marsa, but youse war good ter de ole man."

"Why did they chase you?"

"Dunno, marsa. Mebbe dey didn't want fo' ter tell on 'em."

"Well, they know by this time that I know all about them. They want to get at this wreck out there, but I won't let them."

"Dat's right, marsa—dat's right. Dat's what I come fo' ter tole yer," said the old man, growing quite excited. "Dey am wreckers, an' 'ud steal eberyting dat dey—"

"Oh, I hear old Sancho's voice," cried Anita Narcissa, darting into

the room and grasping the old negro's hand in both of hers. "Why, Uncle Sancho! How glad I am to see you. How is auntie?"

"Bress de chile!" exclaimed the old man, the tears filling his eyes. "Ole Sancho am right glad fo' ter see yer. Is yer well, chile?"

"Never better in my life, Uncle Sancho," she replied. "Mr. Lee and Lem are so kind to me. They do everything they can for me."

"Bress de Lor' for dat, chile," and the old darky laid his hand on her head as affectionately as though she were his own child.

"You came over to tell me to watch out for them, did you?" Larry asked.

"Yes, marsa."

"And they tried to stop you?"

"Yes, marsa."

"They will give you trouble after this, won't they?"

"Spec' dey will, marsa."

"You won't go back to-night, will you?"

"Yes, marsa."

"Why, they'll be waiting for you to murder you!"

"Can't help dat, marsa."

"Well, don't go till very late. They may think you have come to stay all night and go home."

"Yes, marsa."

Larry went up on the balcony to see how the light was working, and found everything going smoothly.

Two hours passed, and then he noticed a bright light in the swamp.

"What does that mean, Sancho?" he asked of the old negro.

Sancho gazed in the direction of the light, and saw cinders go up skyward.

He gave a groan of anguish and exclaimed:

"Dat's my hut. Dem wreckers been gone an' burn it!" and he groaned again.

"Do you really think it is your cabin, Sancho?" Larry asked.

"Yes, marsa," he replied, gazing mournfully at the blaze, which now could be plainly seen from the lighthouse balcony. "An' dey am burnin' up my ole 'oman."

Suddenly the old man seemed to rise above his grief. His eyes flashed fire, his nostrils expanded, and his whole frame quivered with the intensity of his emotions.

"Heah me, good Lor'!" he exclaimed, raising both hands above his gray head, "may I nebber git ter Heaven ef I don't make dem wreckers wisht dey hab nebber seed old Sancho!"

"Amen, Sancho!" cried Larry Lee, grasping the old man's hand, "and may I never get to Heaven if I don't stand by you to the last."

"Tankee, marsa! Tankee!" and the tears rolled down the old negro's face as he spoke.

"You can make your home here with us, Sancho," added Larry.

"You can more than pay for your board by fishing and hunting and helping Lem."

"Tankee, marsa. I mus' go ober dere an' see ef de ole 'oman is erlibe."

"Not by yourself!"

"I'se got ter go, marsa," said the old man.

"Then by the stars above us I'll go with you, and stand by you to the death!"

Anita turned deathly pale at his words, and leaned against the table for support.

"Don't go," she gasped, laying a hand on his arm.

"Why not?"

"They will kill you," she replied.

"I don't think they will. I think old Sancho and I can keep them at a respectful distance."

She was not assured.

"They will murder you, and then—I—will—have no friend."

"Don't be uneasy about that, Miss Narcissa," he said. "I was not born to be killed by such infamous wretches as these. I will promise not to expose myself."

She grew more composed, and old Lem was told to stand guard until he returned.

The old sailor who had been rescued from the wreck of the *Leonias* was still too ill to be on his feet. A high fever had set in, and he was out of his head at times.

"You can remain in your room till I return," said Larry to the

young girl; "and return I will as sure as the stars are shining above the lighthouse."

"I will wait there and pray for your safety," she said, "for you are now the only friend in the wide world who can help me, Mr. Lee."

"Then I shall be sure to return. Come, Sancho, I will be ready to go in a minute. We shall go in the lighthouse boat."

Larry got down a repeating rifle, saw that the charges were all right, buckled on a brace of revolvers, and then led the way downstairs and out on the rocks of the reef.

Lem and old Sancho dragged the boat out and launched it. Larry and Sancho got in and took up the oars.

"We'll go north a mile or two," suggested Larry, "so as not to run into them."

"Yes, marsa, dat's de best way," and they turned northward, rowing parallel with the shore for nearly two miles. When above the spot even with old Sancho's cabin they turned in toward the land, going very cautiously, watching on every side for signs of the wreckers.

They succeeded in making a landing without seeing anything of the wreckers, drew the boat up on the sand, and then made their way into the swamp by a pathway well known to the old negro.

"You know the way, Sancho?"

"Yes, sah; all ob it."

"Lead on, then, and we'll soon come to the light."

Sancho did lead on, and the two soon reached the little island on which his little hut had stood so long.

Just as they expected, they found the hut a heap of ashes and cinders, with no signs of life about the place.

Old Sancho crept up to the pile of smoldering embers and gazed eagerly into them in search of the remains of his old wife. Larry watched him in the light of the burning coals, and thought of the faithful heart that throbbed in the old man's bosom. He had risked life and limb to come to the rescue of his old wife.

"Am dat you, Sancho?" asked a voice in the swamp beyond the smoldering embers.

The old man recognized it as the voice of his faithful old wife, and sprang forward with the speed of a deer, crying out:

"Tank de good Lor' ole 'oman! Bress de Lor' an' Marsa Lee!" and the next moment he had the old woman clasped to his heart in a passionate embrace.

Larry remained on guard, concealed in the bushes, with his repeating rifle. Sancho listened to his wife's story of how she plunged into the swamp and remained there when she heard the wreckers coming.

"Dey burn up our cabin, Sancho," she said, her voice choked by sobs.

"Marsa Lee done gib us er home wid him in de lighthouse, ole 'oman, an' dat am de best place, whar dem wreckers can't come. We's gwine dar now. Tank de good Lor', Marsa Lee! Marsa Lee, heah my ole 'oman!"

Larry came out of the thicket and congratulated the "ole 'oman" on her narrow escape, and said:

"We'd better hasten back, as the wreckers might take a notion to go to the lighthouse in our absence."

"Bress de Lor'!" ejaculated the old wife; "we ain't got no home now."

"You will find a home in the lighthouse, auntie," said Larry, "and Anita is there waiting for you."

"Dat chile am er angel!" exclaimed the old woman, as she turned away from the smoking ruins of her home to follow her husband to the beach.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FUGITIVE STRANGER—OLD SANCHE.

THEY made their way to the beach where they had left the boat, pulled it back into the water, and then entered and pulled for the lighthouse.

On the way back they saw nothing of the wreckers, and landed without any difficulty, after first satisfying Lem that they were not wreckers.

The meeting between Sancho's wife and the young Spanish girl was full of tenderness. The young girl flew to her, and throwing her arms about her neck, kissed her as affectionately as if she were her own mother.

"Bress de Lor', I'se glad ter see yer, chile!" said the old woman, hugging her to her heart. "We ain't got no home now, honey."

"Oh, auntie!" exclaimed Anita. "When I get home I will make my papa send for you and Uncle Sancho. He will do anything for me, and I'll tell him how kind you have been to me, and you shall have a home with me as long as I live!"

"Halleluyah! Bress de Lor'!" cried the old woman. "Dat's a good chile, and de Lor' lubs good chillun!"

"You have a kind heart, Miss Narcissa," said Larry. "These old people have been kind to you. I hope you will not forget them in their old age."

"I will not, Mr. Lee," she replied. "Nor will I forget your own disinterested kindness."

"Please say nothing about that, as you and I have had advantages that this old couple have not. The pleasure of seeing your face, and hearing your voice, repays me for all, and even more."

Anita blushed like a rose, and looked bashfully down at the floor.

"It is now very late," Larry added, "and you all need sleep. Lem and I will have to stand guard all night, to keep the wreckers from boarding the wreck of the Leonidas."

"I am sorry I cannot stand guard, too, and thus render some assistance, Mr. Lee," said Anita, "for I would be so glad to do something."

"If you will keep cheerful and keep house for us, with auntie's help, I will be the happiest man in the wide world!"

"Oh, I will do that!"

"Marsa Lee," said Old Sancho, "de ole man am strong yit, and got lots ob work in him. Don't lef me out."

"Oh, I'll give you plenty of work to do, Uncle Sancho. I'll call you up if we want you. We are crowded for room. You and Lem will have to lie on the floor in the storeroom, and auntie stay in the young lady's room till we can provide better accommodations."

Larry then went to relieve Lem of guard duty, and made a thorough examination of the surroundings.

The night was a clear starlit one, and the sea calm.

"They may not attempt to come back again to-night," he muttered to himself, as he stood his repeating rifle against the wall, "but I won't take any chances on it. They are a treacherous set, and cannot be relied on to do things like any other set of men."

He kept a close watch on everything, and daylight found him at his post as faithful as the stars themselves.

Old Sancho was up before the stars had faded away, and before sunrise had caught fish enough to give them all a hearty breakfast.

Of course there were plenty of provisions in the storeroom, but fresh fish is always a welcome dish on any table. His old wife could fry fish only as one of her experience knew how, and what she didn't know about it no one else did.

Anita was happy at having the old couple with her again, and Larry was glad that she had one of her own sex with her.

As the sun rose above the everglades the great light was put out, the lamps trimmed, filled and put into position again. During the day the wreckers kept very quiet, much to the surprise of the young lighthouse keeper.

They seemed to have ignored the wreck of the Leonidas altogether, and appeared to be waiting for something more profitable to turn up.

But Larry was not the man to relax any of his energies on account of the quiet behavior of the wreckers. He knew, or rather believed that they were concocting some kind of devilry, and that it would show itself sooner or later.

"I am ready for them," he muttered, "and will teach them a lesson they will not soon forget if they make an attempt to board the wreck."

The old sailor whom they had rescued from the wreck was slowly improving, and in a few days it was hoped he would be able to give some useful information about the cargo of the wreck.

Larry kept guard during the day, and night found him still alert.

A little while after the twilight shut out the view of the beach, Larry heard the splash of oars, and a minute or two later the cry of:

"Help! help!" came from toward the shore.

"What the deuce does that mean?" exclaimed Larry.

Bang! bang! went two shots, the flashes of which were plainly seen by those in the lighthouse.

"Help! help!" the cry came nearer and nearer, till Larry could see

dimly through the gloom a small boat with one man in it, pulling for the light; beyond it came the flashes of two more shots.

"Run down, Lem," he said, "and open the door, while I keep the pursuers off. Shut and bolt the door as soon as you let him in."

Lem sprang down the stone steps, and in a few minutes was standing at the base of the lighthouse waiting for the fugitive to land.

Bang! came another shot, and the cry of:

"Help! help!" came over the water again, followed by the hoarse cry of:

"Stop, or we'll riddle you!"

"Ahoy there!" cried Larry.

The pursued and pursuers came on as fast as oars could bring them, and in a few minutes the boat of the pursuers came into good view.

"Ahoy there!" cried Larry again. "Sheer off or I'll fire into you!"

They paid no attention, made no reply, and did not appear to have the fear of the young lighthouse keeper in their minds at all.

"I'll see if a shot won't stop 'em," said Larry, bringing his rifle to his shoulder and taking deliberate aim.

The shot was followed by an exclamation of:

"Oh, God! I'm shot!"

The boat steered short around and pulled for the shore again.

"Somebody was hurt that time," said Larry, as he listened to the retreating oar strokes of the wreckers. "But who in the world can it be they were pursuing? This is not an asylum for fugitives. We'll be overrun with people after awhile. Ah! I hear Lem coming up with him now."

Lem led the way up with a lively step, followed by a white man whose bronzed face was well covered with a heavy black beard.

"You are the lighthouse keeper, are you, sir?" the man asked, on approaching Larry.

"Yes, sir, that's my business here," was Larry's reply.

"I have to thank you for the assistance you rendered in driving back those wretches. I lost my way while out hunting with a camping party, and for two days have been wandering about so confused that I could not tell where I was going. Those people out there attacked me and pursued me so close that I was forced to drop my gun and take one of their boats, which I was fortunate enough to reach before they did. My only hope was to reach the lighthouse before they could overtake me."

"You were fortunate, sir. I happen to know those wreckers out there. They are a murderous set. I am glad to be able to give you protection."

"Thanks, sir. I hope I can get on some passing vessel and make my way to Key West. There I can take a steamer for New York."

"You must be very hungry, sir, after your wanderings," said Larry.

"Of course I am. I would not be human if I were not."

Just then old Sancho came up and looked at the stranger in a peculiar manner. Something in the stranger's voice made him glare at him in a manner unusual with the Southern blacks.

"What's the matter, Sancho?" Larry asked.

Old Sancho made no reply, but walked up to the stranger and snatched his beard off his face, and Captain Blake, the leader of the wreckers, stood before them.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTAIN BLAKE'S ESCAPE.

THE moment he saw that he was discovered, Blake drew a knife and made a desperate lunge at the breast of old Sancho, hissing at the same time:

"You hoary-headed old traitor! I'll have your heart's blood!"

Old Sancho sprang back and drew his knife—an ugly weapon indeed—and stood on the defensive.

"Old Sancho am heah, Marsa Blake, an' ain't er gwine fo' ter run!"

By this time Larry had recovered from his astonishment, and sprang between Blake and the old negro.

"You can settle with me, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I have met you here once before. I don't think you will make another call. Run him through from the other side, Sancho. Show no favor to a wretch like him!"

"Yes, Marsa, I'se gwine fo' ter slice 'im open!" replied the old negro, running round the balcony, so as to get Blake between him and Larry.

"Fair play!" hissed Blake.

"No—not to such as you—at him, Sancho!" and the daring young lighthouse keeper pressed him hard.

"Perdition! I'll see you again, when the best will win!" exclaimed Blake, and flinging his knife at the breast of Larry, sprang over the balcony into the sea.

"My God!" cried Larry, in dumfounded amazement. "That was a desperate escape!"

"P'se gwine arter him, Marsa Lee!" cried old Sancho, preparing to spring over the railings of the balcony.

"Hold on, Sancho! Why kill yourself with him?" and Larry caught the old negro just in time to keep him from going over in the terrible leap.

"Let me go, Marsa Lee!" cried the old man. "Dat man killed my boy! Lef me be, an' ole Sancho 'll make fish bait out'er 'im."

"But don't kill yourself!" cried Larry. "Run downstairs and swim out to him. Lem has gone down already."

The old man sprang away and rushed downstairs with all the speed of a youth, and in a few moments was at the base of the lighthouse.

Lem was there before him and was dragging the boat, in which the wily villain had played fugitive, up on the rocks so as to prevent him from using it as a means of escape to the shore.

"Where is he, Lem?" cried Sancho, glaring wildly around.

"I dunno," replied Lem. "He ain't showed hisself yit."

They watched eagerly for him in the water on that side of the lighthouse, but could see nothing of him.

Larry came down and found them still watching.

"You haven't seen him?" he asked.

"No, sah!"

"Then you may give it up. The fall killed him, and the sharks will have a dinner off of him."

"Tank de Lor'!" ejaculated the old man. "But I wanted ter hab er lick at him myself."

"Well, it's no matter, since you had a hand in making him take the leap. That is some satisfaction to you, or should be."

"Yes, Marsa Lee; I'm glad I was dere. Ole Sancho am gwine ter tell de ole 'oman 'bout dat," and the old man went back upstairs to see his old wife.

"Do you think the fall killed him, Lem?" Larry asked him.

"I dunno, Marsa Larry," said Lem. "I ain't seed nuffin ob him."

"Well, if he escaped this time, I shall regard him as a wonderfully lucky man," and Larry gave another searching glance over the waters around the reef.

It was growing so dark now that objects in the water could be seen but a short distance. All three searched carefully for the daring man's body, and failing to find him, Larry returned upstairs to the lamps.

Pretty soon Lem and old Sancho came up.

"Dat man beats de debbil," ejaculated Lem.

"Dat's er fac'," asserted old Sancho, looking considerably mystified by the disappearance of the daring wrecker.

"I guess he's gone to the bottom this time, though," remarked Larry.

"I hope ter de good Lor' dat he is," said Sancho.

But they were all mistaken in regard to the fate of Captain Blake. He was by no means dead, though his chances of escape were exceedingly slim.

When he found that certain death threatened him on the balcony, between the knives of Larry and old Sancho, Blake did not hesitate to leap over the balcony, from the very spot he had been hurled by young Lee the week before.

He was a man of remarkable presence of mind, and thus lost no time in extricating himself from the certain death that threatened him.

Down, down he went, feet foremost, into the water, striking where it was at least ten fathoms deep.

Of course he came up again.

He knew they would look for him, and before he came to the surface, he resolved to conceal himself behind one of the rocks on the reef, which, it being low tide, were considerably above the water.

To do that was not in the least difficult, and while Lem, Sancho and Larry were talking about him, he heard every word spoken from behind a rock not ten fathoms from where they stood.

When they went back upstairs, Blake raised his head above the rock, looked around and then swam to the main reef on which the lighthouse stood, walked across to the other side, and approached the wrecked hull of the Leonidas.

"I will now see what is in the hull of that wreck—or rather feel what is there, as I cannot see anything in there now," he muttered to himself, as he scrambled up on the deck of the wreck. He crept forward and made his way down into the hold, where it was so dark he could not see his hand before his face. After moving and feeling his way about as best he could, he became disgusted and said:

"This is all a wild-goose chase."

He started up the ladder to the deck again, but crept cautiously back on looking up and seeing Lem leaning over the railing of the balcony, looking down at the wreck.

"Oh, if it was Lee and I had a rifle!" he hissed, as he drew back into the darkness. "If I could send a bullet through his cunning head, I'd be willing to make that leap a dozen times over. And that old Sancho! I'll burn him alive yet, the old traitor!"

He waited another hour, and then found a chance to creep up on deck and climb down over the side of the wreck. The boat he had come in was still up on the rocks where Lem had left it.

Being strong as well as courageous he managed to get it down into the water and then got into it.

Taking the oars he pulled gently away from fresh danger, making as little noise as possible. He got almost out of sight when one of the oars slipped, making a noise unmistakable to those familiar with rowboats.

Instantly Larry ran round on that side of the balcony, and peered out over the water.

Seeing his danger, Blake made a desperate pull and sent his boat flying through the water.

Larry caught a faint glimpse of the boat, however, and called out:

"Boat ahoy!"

Of course Blake made no reply. He only pulled the harder.

Bang! went Larry's rifle, and the ball struck the water some ten feet to the left of the boat.

Blake bent himself to the oars, and pulled for the shore with a vengeance.

Bang—bang! went two more shots, and still the sound of the oars was heard.

Lem and old Sancho ran up to the balcony to see what the trouble was.

"What's de matter, Marsa Lee?" old Sancho asked, very excitedly.

"Blake has got away with the boat," was the reply.

"Oh, Lor'!" and the old man darted downstairs to see if the boat was gone. Lem followed him and they soon found out that it was only too true. The boat and both oars were gone.

"Is the boat gone?" Larry asked from the balcony.

"Yes, sah."

"It was a blunder on our part in not putting the boat in the lighthouse."

"Yes, sah. Dat man is de debbil sah," and both Lem and old Sancho devoutly crossed themselves.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BOLD STROKE.

"Did ever man take such desperate chances and pull through?" Larry asked himself a dozen times. "There are but few men who could make that leap and live. He is the devil for luck. Why didn't I shoot him down as he stood before me? He came to kill me and smash the lamps. I am a fool for being so slow. I could have drawn my revolver and shot him down as he stood before me. I'll try to do it the next time, and not be surprised at anything that happens."

"What's the matter, Mr. Lee?" the soft voice of Anita asked as she came up on the balcony.

"Blake was concealed somewhere below," he replied, "and got away with the boat he came in. I shot three times at him, but I guess I missed him, as I heard him rowing till he almost reached the shore."

"That man seems to bear a charmed life," she remarked.

"Yes; but I think I will get him yet. He will come just once too often, and then he will make a dinner for the sharks."

She gave a shudder of horror, and asked:

"Did he fire back at you?"

"No; he rowed hard to get as far back into the dark so I could not get a good aim."

"It was very daring in him to come here as he did."

"Yes."

"You would not have known it was he?"

"No. Sancho recognized his voice, pulled off his beard, and thus revealed him."

"How fortunate!"

"I should say so. He saved my life."

"Well, you have done as much for him. We would all do as much for you, Mr. Lee."

"Thanks. I know you would, and that is why I am willing to do it for others."

"Do you think they will come back again to-night?"

"I don't know. I will watch for them and be ready for any emergency. You may rest easy, however, for they'll never get in again. This will learn me a lesson I will not soon forget."

She bade him good-night and retired, and the young lighthouse keeper resumed his guard duty, in which he was finally relieved by Lem and old Sancho in succession.

Morning found everything all right, and the regular routine duties of the day were gone through with.

Long before noon Larry was up from a refreshing sleep, and taking his spyglass, scanned the horizon in every direction.

On the beach were half a dozen boats belonging to the wreckers.

"Why can't we destroy or capture those boats?" he asked himself, and immediately he began to consider the feasibility of doing so.

"By the grip of old Neptune!" he exclaimed, "we can do it, and I'll talk to Lem and Sancho about it. That will take all the venom out of their sting."

"What in the world are you talking about, Mr. Lee?" Anita asked, coming unexpectedly upon him on the balcony, where he was talking to himself about capturing the wreckers' boats.

"Why, you little witch!" exclaimed Larry. "You come upon me when I least expect you. I was talking to myself just because you were not here to talk with me."

"What's the subject under discussion? Maybe I can help you elucidate it."

"Do you see those boats out there under the beach?"

"Yes."

"Well, we are going to take them away."

"Who are?"

"Sancho, Lem and I."

She looked at him in great surprise.

"How can you?" she asked. "There are a dozen men in those huts—all armed, too."

"So there are, but don't you see they are more than rifle-shot distance from the boats?"

"Yes, I suppose they are."

"Well, my repeating rifle will carry a ball twice as far as theirs."

"Will it?"

"Yes—I know it will."

"Well, what will you do?"

"Keep them back in their huts with my repeating rifle till Lem and Sancho can gather their boats."

"You would have to kill two or three of them."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, will that be right?"

"Yes. They ought to be killed for the many vessels they have wrecked on this reef."

"Then do it."

He looked at her with a pleased expression on his face, and said:

"I am glad you approve of it. You can sit up here and watch us with this glass," and he handed the spyglass to the young girl, who took it and scanned the entire length of the beach.

The hot sun was coming down in its fiercest heat, and the wreckers were in their huts, venting their rage in curses loud and deep.

Larry called up Lem and old Sancho, and gave them his plans. They were astonished at the boldness of it, and shook their heads.

"Dere's too many on 'em," said Lem.

"But even were a dozen to come out at once," said Larry, "I could shoot 'em all down before they could get to us."

He then explained the workings of his repeating rifle to old Sancho, until he satisfied him as to what he could do with it.

They finally agreed to go, and Larry started them down to prepare the boat at once, lest their courage should cool off.

Taking his repeating rifle with him, he entered the boat and shoved off, making direct for the boats on the beach.

Anita sat on the balcony of the lighthouse and watched them, and frequently waved her handkerchief at them.

As they neared the beach the wreckers ran out of their huts in utter amazement at the young lighthouse keeper's daring in thus coming right into their clutches.

They ran into their huts again, and soon returned with guns in their hands.

Larry did not wait for them to commence the attack.

They were at war with him, and he with them, so he did not stand on ceremony, but opened fire at once.

The first shot took effect in the shoulder of one of the wreckers fully half a mile away, and sent him in the hut howling like a hyena.

"Dar!" cried old Sancho, almost beside himself with suppressed excitement. "Dat's good for yer. Shoot agin, Marsa Lee."

Crack! went the rifle again, and the next man was hit in the side. He doubled up like a jackknife, and went yelling back into the hut.

The wreckers now fired a volley at the three daring men, but their balls struck the water a little over half way.

Crack! and another wrecker was hit. Larry took good aim each time.

"Good Lor'!" cried old Sancho, "ef dey ain't er runnin' inter dere huts!"

"Row hard, men," said Larry. "I'll keep 'em in the hut now. Make for that first boat out there."

They reached the boat and made fast to it. A volley was fired from the hut, but no bullet reached them.

"Shoot 'em, Marsa Larry!" cried Lem, "if dey comes outen de door!"

"Never mind them, old boy," said Larry. "You look after the boats. I'll keep an eye on them."

They pushed on, and gathered everyone of the half dozen boats that were along the beach, and made fast to them. The wreckers dashed out of the huts, and rushed toward the beach.

Crack! Crack! went Larry's rifle, and two of their number tumbled over on the sand. The others wheeled and returned, leaving the two wounded men on the ground. The wounded finally got up and staggered back.

"Now, pull for the lighthouse," said Larry, "we've got all their boats. Maybe they won't bother us any more now."

With a ringing shout the two old negroes pulled away at their oars, and the string of boats followed in their wake.

When they were a mile from the beach, the wreckers came out of their huts and gazed after the daring young lighthouse keeper, shaking their fists in the air, and swearing themselves hoarse in their rage.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PARTIAL REVELATION.

WHEN almost under the balcony of the lighthouse, Larry looked up and saw the slender form of Anita leaning forward. She waved a handkerchief, and called out to him:

"Bravo! Bravo!"

He lifted his hat and waved it above his head.

A few minutes later the two old blacks landed him at the foot of the lighthouse.

Leaping ashore, he turned to Lem with:

"Take the boats inside, Lem. Don't take any more chances, but lock 'em up."

"Yes, sah," replied the old black. "I don' lef no more boats out heah. Dat Cap'en Blake am de debbil for suah. I'se gwine to put 'em all inside."

"That's right. They will have to swim if they pay us any more visits."

"Yes, sah, an' den de sharks 'll git 'em."

"Oh, I reckon they won't undertake to swim over," returned Larry, turning and ascending the stairs, leaving the two old negroes to carry the boats into the hollow space at the base of the lighthouse.

When he reached the balcony Anita was there to receive him. She met him with a smile and said:

"I saw you conquer a dozen men, Mr. Lee, and I——"

"Oh, I had the advantage of a long range repeating rifle, Ma

Anita," he said, interrupting her. "They could have no show against that, you know."

"Yes, but they were more than ten to one!"

"That made no difference. It would have been death to the whole party had they exposed themselves. I don't think we will have any more trouble with them after this. They will have to go to Key West for more boats, or else leave this coast altogether."

"Oh, I do hope they will go away."

"So do I."

"You must have killed several of them."

"I don't think any were killed, but they are no doubt very badly hurt."

"They must suffer then, for they have no surgeon to dress their wounds."

"Those kind of characters have a rude knowledge of surgery among themselves, and seem to get along with very primitive treatment of wounds. How is the old sailor getting along?"

"He is doing well, I think," she replied. "His fever has left him and he is in his right mind again, but very weak."

"I must go down and see him," and putting his rifle away he prepared to visit the old sailor, who had been suffering terribly from the effects of injuries received in the gale that wrecked the *Leonidas*. He found him very weak; his mind clear, but unable to do much talking.

"Ah, you are better now," he said to the old man, as he felt of his pulse, "and a little food in your locker will do you good."

"It was a close run, commodore," said the old sailor.

"Yes, but I think you will find it smooth sailing after this," said Larry, soothingly.

"Ay, sir, I hope so."

Larry then ordered proper food prepared for him, and went up to attend to the lamps again.

That night it was very dark, but the water was as smooth as glass. The light shone as bright as ever, and was seen many miles at sea. Larry was busy attending to and watching the working of the light, when he was startled by a rifle shot between him and the shore, and a bullet crashed through the thick glass that screened the lamp.

He wheeled around and glared into the darkness beyond. Of course he could see nothing. Only a pall of intense darkness was before him.

"Where in the world did that shot come from?" he muttered. "Can it be that they had other boats concealed in their huts? I'll go down and set Lem and Sancho at work to watch for them, and——"

Crack! came another shot the moment his head was turned, and a bullet whizzed through his hat, just grazing his head.

"By the great light!" gasped Larry, picking up his hat and running his finger through the hole made by the bullet. "That shot was intended for me! Two shots, and yet I haven't had a glimpse of the flash of their guns. I am exposed in this light, and the darkness conceals them. Good Lord! There's no more safety for me about the balcony of nights!"

He had dodged down the stone stairs, and gone into his room, where he took down his repeating rifle. Then instructing all in the place to keep quiet, he went below to the outside, and took up his stand on the rocks to await another flash of the gun.

He had not been five minutes there ere he heard another shot and saw the flash. Quick as lightning he raised his rifle and fired at the flash.

A mocking laugh was heard not more than one hundred fathoms away.

"I missed that time," said the young lighthouse keeper, "but you may fire once too often. Just blaze away again."

A few minutes later and another flash startled him. He fired as quickly as possible, and had the mortification of hearing another mocking laugh over his failure.

"Go ahead," he muttered; "maybe you'll ruin the light, but I guess I'll get in a shot after awhile."

Half a dozen more shots were exchanged, and then Larry heard a sudden exclamation, followed by a groan.

"Ah! I guess I got him that time!" and Larry himself indulged in a hearty laugh for the benefit of the assailants.

He heard several more groans, and waited to hear another shot. But no more shots were fired.

An hour passed, and still nothing more than an occasional groan was heard.

"That fellow is badly hurt," said Larry, "and I'm going to see how it is with him," and going inside he called out for Lem.

"Sah?" responded the faithful black.

"Come down, you and Sancho."

"Yes, sah," and in another minute he heard the two old darkies descending the stairs.

"Get out a boat and row me out to that fellow. I think I have put a bullet through him."

The boat was soon dragged out to the water.

Larry got in and ordered them to row him out toward the shore. The two negroes obeyed tremblingly, and in a few minutes they came within sight of a dark object on the water, which looked very much like a log.

They drew up to it and found it to be a canoe, or dugout, which Sancho instantly recognized as one of his he had used in the lagoon over in the swamp.

In the bottom of the canoe lay a man groaning feebly—only one man—and Larry asked him:

"Are you the man who was firing at the light?"

"Yes," was the weak reply.

"You are one of Blake's wreckers, are you not?"

"Yes, but I am done for now."

"Where are you hit?"

"In the chest."

"Then I guess you are done for," said Larry. "How is it that only one of you came out to-night?"

"Some of 'em are hurt," was the reply, "and I was chosen to come."

He groaned again, as if in great pain, and gasped out:

"Curses on you! You have killed two of our men and ruined our business!"

Then another spasm of pain seized him, and Larry really thought he would die in a few minutes.

But the spasm passed, and, though much weaker, the man hurled anathemas on the head of the young lighthouse keeper.

"You really don't blame me," said Larry, "for doing my duty and defending myself. You'd better unload your conscience than lose any more time heaping curses on me. You'll go down soon, you know."

"Yes—yes—I'm going down. Breakers ahead!" and then he grew quiet for a few minutes.

Suddenly he spoke up and said:

"I'm going down. The ship is sinking. The waters dash over me! Do you see the white beach out there?"

"No," said Larry. "It's too dark. I can't see anything but that light up there."

"The beach is there—it's there," said the dying wretch. "Under a rock—which is seen—only when—the tide—is—out—is buried—a—ugh! Save! save me——" and a gurgling sound in his throat like one strangling in water interrupted his speech. He gave a convulsive shudder, stiffened out and was—dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEAD WRECKER—RETURN TO THE LIGHTHOUSE.

THE young lighthouse keeper gazed at the face of the dead man, as if waiting to hear him say more. But his silence continuing, he laid his hand on his heart.

"He's dead," he said.

"Yes, marasa," said old Sancho. "Him dead an' de debbil's got him."

Lem crossed himself, and looked up at the brilliant light on the tower, as if longing to be there instead of where he was.

"What shall we do with him?" Larry asked, looking first at one and then at the other of the two old negro men.

"Frow him in de water," suggested Lem, the first to speak.

"You both heard his story, didn't you?" Larry asked.

"Yes, sah," they both replied.

"He said that under a rock which could be seen at low tide something was buried."

"Yes, sah," replied both.

"He didn't say what was buried there, though."

"No, sah, he didn't."

"It was something that weighed heavily on his mind, and he wanted to tell us about it. It's either a crime or a treasure."

"Yes, sah."

"Well, don't forget it," said Larry. "And above all things don't say anything about it to anyone else, till we can find out what it is."

"No, sah."

"If it's a treasure it may be that we may find it and have enough to make us all rich, for I would divide it with both of you."

"Dere money ain't dere, marsa," said Old Sancho, shaking his head.

"How do you know it isn't?"

"'Case dey hide it in de swamp," replied the old man.

"Have you ever seen them hide any there, Sancho?"

"No, sah! I seed 'em go in dere wif fings an' come away widout 'em. But dey shoot niggers ef dey look roun' too smart."

"Then they must have marked some tree in the swamp as a guide by which to find it again. Some day when there are no wreckers about we will go in there and look for any singular mark on the trees or logs."

Sancho shook his head.

"You won't go, eh?"

"Bad place for nigger ter go, marsa," he said.

"How so?"

"De place is haunted. Dere's ghosts in dat swamp, marsa."

"Oh, I don't think ghosts ever hurt anyone, Sancho, and——"

"De Lor' Gorrarmighty!" gasped Lem, starting back, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

"What's the matter?" Larry asked.

"Dat was er shark, you nigger!" said old Sancho, looking over the side of the life boat into the water.

"Bress de Lor'," groaned Lem; "it gin me a look in de face an' spit in my eye, suah!"

"Ah! there he is now, on the other side of the canoe!" said Larry. "I guess its tail knocked a little water in your face, Lem. A shark doesn't chew tobacco nor spit."

But Lem was demoralized.

He felt very nervous whenever he was near a dead person. The sight of the dead wrecker lying flat on his back, with wide open eyes, staring up at the silent stars, was too much for one of his superstitious nature.

"Le's go home, Marse Larry," he said, shaking as if convulsed with an ague.

"Yes, yes, in a minute," replied Larry. "What shall we do with this canoe, Sancho?"

"Take it wid you, Marsa," replied the old man.

"Help me give this man to that shark, then."

"Yes, sah."

The old man assisted Larry in throwing the body of the dead wrecker into the sea. He had not the same fears that troubled Lem.

The body had not more than touched the water than there was a swift rush of sharks, and in a few minutes it was torn to pieces by those voracious tigers of the sea.

Sancho secured the canoe to the lifeboat, and then he and Lem took the oars and pulled for the lighthouse.

They had made about a half dozen strokes when they heard signals from the beach.

"Hark!" exclaimed Larry; "stop—listen!"

They held up the oars.

A shrill whistle came over the water to them.

Then a silence of five minutes or more ensued, then followed another whistle very like an ordinary boatswain's whistle.

"Can you answer that, Sancho?" Larry asked.

"Yas, sah—I kin whistle like dat."

"Do so, then."

The old man placed two fingers in his mouth and blew a shrill blast that sounded far and wide over the dark waters.

"De Lor' Gorrarmity!" exclaimed Lem, "dat'll skeer de whales!"

"Hush-sh!" cautioned Larry.

Another whistle came from the beach, and Sancho returned it in a still louder blast.

"Come ashore!" came a hoarse voice from the beach.

It was a long way off, but Larry caught the words distinctly.

But he made no reply.

"Pull for the light," he said to the two blacks, "and don't knock the oars—pull slow."

They did as he bid them, and in a few minutes they reached the foot of the stone tower.

"Now put the boat in again," said Larry.

"Yes, sah."

"But what will you do with the old canoe, Sancho? You can't get that in. It's too long and too heavy."

"Pull it up on de rocks, sah."

"The tide will carry it ashore again," said Larry, "unless you chain it fast."

"Yes, sah. I'se gwine ter tie her up hard an' fast."

He went into the tower and brought out a cable, with which he and Lem proceeded to tie up the canoe so it could not get away through any action of the sea.

"Now come in and shut the door," ordered Larry. "Be sure you fasten the door, Lem."

"Yes, sah," and the negro shot the heavy bolt in its place, rendering the place as secure as any bank safe.

"What in the world is the matter," Anita asked, when Larry came up into the bright little room, where she was sitting reading a book.

He told her the story of the rifle shots and the result of his random shots in the dark.

"Oh, it is horrible!" she exclaimed shudderingly. "They'll kill or wound you yet."

"I don't think they will," he replied, "or they would have done so long ago. I think we will yet drive them away. When the supply ship comes I will report them, and the government will send a company of soldiers to arrest or drive them away."

"Oh, I hope they will. They are such cruel, heartless men."

"Do you know I think those men have a great treasure buried somewhere about here, which is why they will not leave."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. That wretch in the canoe was telling me of something buried under a certain rock which was bare at low tide, when death cut him short."

"Then there must be something buried there," she remarked. "But do you know the rock he spoke of?"

"There are a number of rocks along the beach at low tide," he said. "But I don't think it can be a very large rock, for he said 'under' the rock."

"Then you ought to be able to find it."

"So it would seem. But there are too many desperate men on shore there yet for me to hunt for any treasure. It's as much as I can do to keep them from destroying the light. But I will remember what he said, and when they are driven away I will hunt the whole beach over for the rock he spoke of."

"Oh, yes! You could take all the time you wanted then, and without any danger, too."

"Yes. Do you know, I think that whatever it is that's buried there it has some connection with you."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes, and I cannot say why I think so. But the impression is so strong on my mind that I cannot shake it off."

"Oh, I wish I knew what it is," she sighed. "I've always believed that something was wrong—that everything had not been explained to me; and now the same impression is on your mind. Will this mystery never be solved?"

"Time will solve," said Larry, "and I will do all in my power to unearth it. That man intended to tell me all, but death came too quick. Old Sancho thinks they concealed treasure in the swamp also. If we can once get rid of them we can do much toward recovering many things they have either hidden or buried."

"Oh, I would be willing to wait for years if I was sure of having some things cleared up," said the beautiful young Spanish girl.

"Well, those wretches cannot remain long on this coast after I send in my report by the government supply ship. I must go up to the light now and see to it. One of the large glasses was broken to-night," and he passed on up the narrow staircase to the great light at the top of the tower.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS OARSMAN.

It was a very dark night, but the wind was hushed, and the bosom of the sea as smooth as a mirror. The great light shone out far and wide over the great deep.

Larry passed round to the land side of the light, and saw the holes made by the bullets by the murderous wrecker.

"It won't hurt the light to-night," he said, as he stopped and gazed at the tiny holes. "It didn't do the damage he thought it would. It must have been a splendid rifle he used to make such small holes at such a distance. Had he been a good marksman he would have ended my career to-night. He must have dropped his rifle in the water, as I didn't see it in the canoe."

Going round the light several times to see that everything worked well, he descended to his room to arrange some instruments he wanted to use in the morning. He was busy for more than an hour, after which he went up to the light again to make the usual inspection.

Suddenly he stopped and listened.

The sound of oars came up from below.

"My God!" he gasped, "they are right under us!" and he stood still and listened to the steady pull of oars in the row-locks.

The knowledge that they could not get in, however, calmed his fears, and he laid down on the balcony to be out of the light, and thus avoid being made another target for some miserable wrecker to shoot at.

As he lay there he heard the sound of oars, as though a boat was right at the foot of the tower. Yet it did not seem to advance or recede.

Full ten minutes passed, and still the sound continued.

"This passes my understanding," he muttered, and then he heard a soft voice on the other side of the light call:

"Mr. Lee! Mr. Lee!"

He recognized the voice of Anita Narcissa, who had come softly up the narrow stairs to the balcony.

"Did you call, Miss Narcissa?" he asked, in a low tone, just loud enough for her to hear.

"Yes, yes!" she replied quite excitedly. "Where are you?"

"Oh, I'm here—on this side."

She ran around and found him lying flat on the floor of the balcony.

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Do you know there is a boat right under my window?" she asked.

"Please sit down on the floor here so you will not be exposed in the light."

She dropped down on the floor by his side.

"Have you seen the boat?" he asked.

"No. I dared not look out."

"Well, I've heard it, too," he said, "and have been listening for over ten minutes, but can't see anything, though it's hard to see anything on the water so close under the tower."

"Oh, can't they get in?"

"No. It's utterly impossible," he said, "so don't be uneasy about that. I don't understand it, though."

"Don't understand what?"

"How they keep rowing and remain in the same place all the time."

Anita looked puzzled and made no reply. She listened in silence for another ten minutes, and then saw that the sound neither advanced nor receded.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a mocking laugh from out on the water, perhaps a hundred yards away, between the lighthouse and the shore.

"Oh, mercy!" gasped Anita. "They are coming!"

Larry looked out on the dark waters vainly trying to pierce the gloom, but could see nothing. The sound of the oars continued.

"Be quiet and don't get excited," he said. "A thousand of them can't get in. The door is fire-proof, water-proof, and proof against everything but lightning."

"Oh, I'm so glad of that! Do you see any boat?"

"No. I see nothing, and yet I can distinctly hear every stroke of the oars."

"So can I."

Ten minutes passed, during which time the two listened in profound silence to the steady oar strokes somewhere in the waters below them.

Suddenly they were startled by that horrible, mocking laugh again. A shudder passed through both.

"I never heard such a devilish mocking laugh before in all my life," said Larry, when the sound of laughter passed away.

"Nor I," returned Anita. "But why in the world can't we see the boat?"

"I don't know, unless it's too dark," he said. "What puzzles me the most is that they appear to be stationary and rowing all the time."

"Yes, that is strange," she said. "What do you think is the cause of it, Mr. Lee?"

"Indeed I don't know. That laugh sounds just like the man who died in the old canoe out there to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Lee!"

"What?"

"Can dead men laugh?"

"I never knew or heard of one langhing," he replied.

"Are you sure he was dead?"

"Yes—dead as a dried herring."

"Maybe he was only feigning death," she suggested.

"Not much, I guess. The sharks tore him to pieces in less'n two minutes, and I guess there wasn't any feigning about that."

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"I never saw one in my life," he replied.

"Neither have I, but I have heard of such things."

"Oh, so have I, but I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in mocking tones from below again, and the young girl shuddered as if a blast from the North Pole had enveloped her.

"You had better go to your room," he said. "This will only make you nervous, and drive sleep away from you."

"Oh, I couldn't sleep," she replied; "please don't send me away, Mr. Lee," and the young girl looked so pleadingly into his face that he had not the heart to insist on her retiring. Besides he preferred to have her with him anyhow.

"Oh, you can stay as long as you like," he said, "only I didn't know but it might unstring your nerves to remain."

They relapsed into silence and listened to the sound of the oars, which kept up a steady pull for hours.

Larry got up at the regular time, and made the circuit of the light, to see if everything was all right. Then he came back to where Anita was sitting, and said:

"I am going down on the rocks to see if I can solve this mystery of the oars."

She sprang up, and said:

"You will let me go too, will you not?"

"Yes, if you wish."

Lem and Sancho were both soundly sleeping. They were to watch in the mornings, when the young lighthouse keeper was sleeping.

Larry led the way downstairs, and the young Spanish girl followed close on his heels. She was so nervous and excited that she dared not let him get out of her sight. She believed him capable of protecting her against all the world.

Down, down they went through the narrow, winding staircase, Larry carrying his never failing rifle and a lantern.

At the bottom he gave the lantern to Anita to hold whilst he unbarred the heavy iron and oaken door.

"There's no one here," he said, as he opened the door and looked out on to the rocks.

He stepped out and looked around.

The sound of oars stopped and naught but the gentle murmur of the waters, as they caressed the rocks of the reef, was heard.

Larry peered out over the water as far as vision could penetrate the gloom of the night, and failed to make out anything like a boat.

The old canoe in which the wrecker had been slain, lay moored to the rocks, just as old Sancho and Lem had left it.

"Ah, I remember it well," Anita said, as she gazed down at the familiar old dugout. "Old Uncle Sancho has had it for many years. I know he must have been glad to see it again."

"I know he was very much surprised when he saw it," said Larry, "for he left it hidden in the swamp, where he supposed no one but himself knew where it was."

He looked around again to see if any object was floating near, and then said:

"We may as well go up again. I don't see anything wrong below."

"No one could swim from the land here, could he?" Anita asked.

"Oh, yes, very easily, if the sharks would let him, but they won't," was the reply.

She turned and followed him inside, and held the lantern for him while he secured the door. Then they made their way upstairs again.

"You had better go to bed now," he said to the young girl when they reached the door of the little room that had been assigned to her.

"There is nothing wrong about, and if there was, nothing can get inside, so good-night, and pleasant dreams."

"Good-night," she said softly, and entered her room. Larry wended his way upstairs to look after the light. But the moment he entered the balcony he was startled by the sound of oars again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HORRORS OF A NIGHT.

HE stopped and listened.

The same measured strokes of the oars came rolling up to the height where he stood, and, as before, seemed neither to advance nor recede.

"There it is again," he muttered to himself. "I can't understand it. I may know something about it to-morrow. It's very strange I couldn't hear it down on the rocks. I'll try to find it out to-morrow."

He looked after the light and then turned and gazed out to sea, where several lights in the distance told of vessels, freighted with merchandise and precious lives, were riding the deep, guided by the great light at his back. He felt the great responsibility of his position, and inwardly resolved to defend his trust with his life if necessary.

After awhile he walked around to the land side and turned his attention to a small light on shore, which seemed to be a lantern in the hands of some one—a wrecker, probably.

It seemed to be moving slowly toward the swamp. Larry watched it for nearly an hour, and then saw it disappear about where he judged the edge of the swamp to be.

Just as it disappeared that mocking laugh came up from the sea so suddenly that he almost fell over the balusters of the balcony, so much did it startle him.

He stopped and listened.

"Ah, by the great hurricane!" he exclaimed, on recovering himself, "I know that laugh now! I don't understand it, but it's the same laugh I heard when I shot at that fellow in the canoe to-night. I've heard of such things before, but I never believed them. It's the same laugh—I can't be mistaken about that. I hope Lem and Sancho won't hear it, for negroes are very superstitious about such things. I don't mind it myself, though I would rather it wouldn't do that way. It would seem to me as if I am the one who is entitled to the laugh. He got wiped out. I didn't. Hanged if I haven't a mind to laugh back at him. I will, if he comes back again another night."

He then turned to the light again, and was looking at the bullet hole in the glass when, whack! something took him on the back of the head and staggered him forward, almost stunning him to unconsciousness.

On recovering himself he wheeled around and drew a revolver, for he thought he had been attacked in person.

But he saw no one.

At his feet lay a large mallard duck, dead.

"Ah! it was a duck!" he exclaimed, a feeling of infinite relief coming to him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came that mocking laugh again, as if jeering him for his fears.

"Oh, laugh away!" he cried. "I can stand it if you can!" And he picked up the dead duck and threw it far out into the water, where it struck with a loud splash.

The moment it struck the water the rowing of the mysterious boatman stopped.

More surprised than ever, Larry stood still for ten minutes and listened. He could hear no more rowing, and he breathed easier, for the mystery of the thing troubled him not a little.

The night passed and daylight came. As the sun rose over the land Larry put out the lamps and went down to breakfast, which Lem had prepared for him and the young Spanish girl.

At the table Larry told her about the duck knocking him across the balcony, and how that laugh came up a moment later, as if enjoying the joke.

She smiled and said:

"How strange it all is.

"Yes; but the strangest thing yet," he said, "remains to be told."

"What is that?" she eagerly asked.

"When I took up the dead duck and threw it as far out as I could, I waited to hear it strike the water. I heard it, and the moment it struck the rowing ceased. I haven't heard an oar stroke since."

Anita was astonished. She looked at him as though she half ex-

pected him to furnish a solution of the whole mystery. But he resumed his eating and quietly remarked:

"I'll tell you of a discovery I made after I have had my nap."

"About that rowing?" she asked.

"No—about the laughter."

She grew more and more interested, and asked:

"Won't you tell me before you go to sleep?"

"Yes—after breakfast."

She ate in silence after that, and finished her meal as soon as he did.

Accompanying him upstairs to the balcony, he turned and explained to her the mocking laughter that followed his shots at the wrecker in the canoe in the early part of the night.

"It was the same laugh I heard then," he said.

"Then it was a dead man's laugh!" she said, turning pale. "The lighthouse is haunted."

"Oh, no. Such a thing is utterly impossible. I don't believe in ghosts, and am not afraid of them."

She looked at him in a puzzled sort of way, and asked:

"Do you think it was the dead man?"

"No. A dead man can't laugh."

"Who was it, then?"

"Ah, I don't know. We'll get at it after awhile, though, I guess."

He scanned the horizon and then turned to the beach.

"The wreckers are looking for the man they sent out in the canoe," he said, "and are puzzled to know what has become of him. Don't you see them out there by their cabins?"

"Yes, but it's so far away I can't make out what they are doing. They look like little children at this distance."

"Wait till I get the spyglass," and he ran down the narrow stairs to his room, where he got the glass. Returning he gave it to her, and said:

"Now, look and tell me what you see, if you can."

"She leveled the glass and looked through it for a minute or two.

"They are looking at us through a glass," she said.

"Just as I expected. They are looking for their man," said Larry. "I'll bet they are a sick set of rascals this morning."

"Oh, I do wish they would go away," said Anita. "I am so afraid they will do something terrible."

"They will if they can, but I don't think they are going to get very far ahead of Larry Lee."

The young girl remained on the balcony enjoying the fresh sea breeze, whilst Larry proceeded to take out the glass containing the bullet holes, and put in another whole one.

This work done, he went below and turned in for a nap.

The young Spanish girl remained a long time on the balcony, spyglass in hand, watching the movements of the wreckers.

She had nothing else to do, and so she did it well. The character of the wretches on the beach was such that she would have contributed all in her power to sweep them from the coast forever.

As she sat there watching their movements she saw two of them go off together toward the swamp in which old Sancho had lived until his cabin had been destroyed.

One of them carried a small box under his arm—on the farther side of him.

She kept the glass leveled at them till they entered the swamp, and mentally marked the spot where they disappeared from view.

"Ah!" she said, "I can find that very spot again. Just the other side of that old cypress. I can't fail to remember that, and I know Mr. Lee would like to know it. How glad I am I kept up this watch for him! They think he is asleep, and no one cares to watch them."

Just then old Sancho came up to the balcony.

"Oh, Uncle Sancho!" she exclaimed, "I saw two men go into the swamp just now, carrying a small box with them."

"Dey am de debbil, for suah, honey," the old man said. "Dey is up ter mischief agin', I speck."

"Of course they are; but what kind of mischief can it be now?"

"I dunno, honey. I see gwine to go ober dere ter-night, suah," and the old darky gazed wistfully over in the direction of the spot where his little cabin once stood.

Both the young girl and the old man relapsed into a silence again that lasted nearly an hour.

At the end of that time Anita and the old negro went down to the dining room, where old Sancho's wife was putting things to rights.

At noon Larry waked up greatly refreshed, and went up to look after the lamps. His daily duty in respect to them was soon performed, and then he went below to examine the canoe in which the wrecker had breathed his last the night before.

Old Sancho came down and was telling him how long he had been the sole owner of the old dugout, when he suddenly started back with a cry of horror.

"What is it, Sancho?"

"Oh, look dere! Oh, de Lor' sabe us! Look dere—ugh?" And he pointed to the other end of the canoe, which was farthest out in the water, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

Larry looked over that way, and was himself horrified at seeing a human hand jerked back under the water, as if to prevent being seen.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MONSTER SHARK AND HIS LITTLE GAME.

THE sight sent a thrill of horror through the sinewy frame of the young lighthouse keeper.

He was not one to be frightened by any danger he could understand, nor was he afraid even now, but a feeling strange and undefinable took possession of him.

Somehow or other he became possessed with the idea that the hand showed signs of life, for it seemed to open and then close quickly as it was jerked under the water.

To make sure of seeing it again, should it rise above the water a second time, Larry sprang into the canoe and ran to the farther end, where he knelt down and leaned forward so as to look down into the clear depths.

"Look out dere, marsa!" cried old Sancho, frightened almost out of his senses; "dat was de ebil one. Lor' sabe us!"

"Keep a good lookout yourself, Sancho," he said, "and let me know if you see it again."

"Yes, sah," was the trembling reply. "Hope it won't nebber come back no more."

They both looked in vain for the hand to reappear—one wishing to see it rise to the surface and the other inwardly praying that it would not.

At last, after the lapse of a half hour, Larry rose to his feet and glanced around and along the reef of rocks, hoping to find some clew to the mystery of the hand.

Suddenly he felt the canoe touched by something underneath it which caused a cold chill to run down his spine, for the first thought that flashed through his brain was that it was the human hand again.

He looked down, however, into the clear water, and saw there an immense shark swimming lazily about, as if waiting for him to fall from the canoe into his spacious jaws.

"Oh!" he said, drawing a breath of relief. "It was a shark. I thought it was that hand again. I am glad Miss Narcissa is not here to see this."

Sancho heard him talking to himself, but could not understand what he said.

A few minutes later he saw the shark himself, and called out:

"Look dere, marsa! Dat's a man-eater, suah!"

"Yes, I've been watching him," was the quiet reply. "He's a big one. Run up and tell Lem to send me the harpoon. I'll get him and see if he swallowed that hand."

"Good Lor', marsa!" gasped the old darky, crossing himself and starting in a run for the door of the tower.

While the old negro was gone after the harpoon, Larry kept his eye on the shark, in order not to lose sight of him. He had no difficulty in keeping him in view, as the fellow was a large one, and did not seem disposed to go away from that particular spot.

Suddenly, to Larry's very great surprise, the fish rose quickly up under the canoe and gave it a sharp thump. Then he went down again and stopped, as if to see the result of his action.

"Great lights!" exclaimed Larry; "I believe the rascal is trying to get me out of the canoe! He rose up and struck a pretty good thump, and then waited to see what I would do!"

"Flyer's de harpoon, marsa," said Sancho, as he and Lem came out together with the weapon.

"Give it to me, then," Larry said. "This is the most impudent shark I ever saw."

They handed him the harpoon. But he was more intent on watching the shark than in trying to kill or capture him.

"Dere he is!" cried Sancho, as he caught a glimpse of the monster under the canoe.

"I see him," said Larry. "I want to see what he'll do."

"He'll go away ef he sees dat harpoon," said Lem. "Dem sharks is drefful smart, dey is. Dey know er harpoon an— look out dar! He am er comin' up, Marse Larry."

The monster came up under the canoe, and struck it a sharp blow, as if trying to capsize it, and then darted below again, where he waited in plain view, as if to see if he had knocked anything out of it.

The two negroes were utterly dumfounded. It was evident that the shark was trying to throw Larry out of the canoe.

"De Lor' Gorramitey!" gasped Lem. "Jes look at dat debbil! He done gone an' butt him head agin dat dugout! Afo' de Lor' dat am de ole Nick. Git outer dat dugout, Marse Larry!"

"Never mind, Lem," said Larry; "just wait till I give him a taste of this iron. He'll wish he had been butting the rocks instead of this canoe."

Larry was equal to an old whaler in throwing the harpoon. He held it in position till he saw the monster rise again, and then let him have it with all the force he could put into his arm.

It struck him about three feet behind his head, in the thick part of his body.

There was a sudden dash. The canoe was struck, and Larry went headlong into the water.

A cry of horror went up from both Lem and Sancho. Anita heard them, and came running down to see what the matter was.

Just as she reached the rocks, Larry scrambled out of the water in time to escape another shark which made a dash for his legs.

"By Neptune!" he exclaimed, as he got on his feet. "That was close sailing. That fellow was laying for me all the time and came near getting me at last."

"Whar dat harpoon, Marse Larry?" Lem asked, looking at the young man and then at the water.

"Ask the shark," said Larry. "I gave it to him. I guess he'll have trouble in getting rid of it."

"Dere he am!" cried old Sancho, as the monster made a run and struck the harpoon against the side of the canoe. His plunges were terrific. He was in his death agonies, and seemed to have a special spite against the old dugout.

"Bress the Lor'!" ejaculated Lem, his eyes like saucers, "dat's de shark dat looked me in de face las' night and frowed water in my eye!"

"Try to catch that line, Sancho," said Larry, as the long line attached to the harpoon followed the man-eater as he plunged and dashed about.

"Oh, Lor', marsa!" groaned the old darky.

"What in the world is the matter, Mr. Lee?" Anita asked, as she came near enough to see how wet he was.

"I fell out of that canoe," he replied, laughing good-naturedly, "just as I harpooned a shark."

"Oh! Where is the shark?"

"There he is now!"

The water about the canoe grew red with the blood of the man-eater. The monster plunged about, seeming determined not to leave the dugout. He made a desperate attempt to bite the end, and succeeded in cutting off a good-sized piece.

"Ugh! What a horrible mouth he has!" exclaimed Anita, with a shudder.

"He's a big one," remarked Larry. "I want to catch him for a purpose," and he again entered the canoe for the purpose of trying to catch the line.

He succeeded, and, in a few minutes, he had the line in his hands, but was unable to manage it by himself.

Lem and old Sancho took hold, and the three finally succeeded in killing him.

He was a very large one, over fifteen feet in length.

They drew him up on the rocks, where he made several serious snaps with his great jaws, frightening the young maiden until she ran back into the tower, and hastened up to her room.

"Now, Sancho—Lem!" cried Larry. "Help me open him. Get me a knife."

Lem ran in for the big carving-knife, and soon returned with it.

The shark was now dead.

Larry ordered Lem and Sancho to turn him over on his back. They did so, and he then cut him open.

Inside his stomach he found several bits of cloth, a whole shoe, and a piece of leather belt.

"Just as I expected," he said, as he looked at the contents of the man-eater's stomach. "This is the fellow that helped eat the wrecker whom we threw out of the canoe last night. He has been hanging around the dugout ever since waiting for another meal."

Lem and Sancho shuddered.

Larry went on with his investigation of the contents of the fish, taking up the pieces of rags and searching them one by one.

Suddenly his hand touched something hard in one of the rags. He took it out and found it to be a gold locket, set with diamonds, inside of which was the picture of a man's face.

CHAPTER XX.

THE STORY OF THE LOCKET.

"Ah!" he said, on looking at the trinket. "The sea gives up its secrets sometimes in a manner least expected. This came off the wrecker, as the contents of the stomach show a recent meal. I wonder who it can be—this face? Lem, look in that rag over there and see if you can't find something there."

Lem did as he was ordered, and in a few moments Larry heard a cry of surprise from him.

"What's the matter, Lem?" he asked.

"I've foun' some yaller money, Marse Larry," exclaimed Lem.

"The deuce you have! Let's see it."

Lem held up three twenty-dollar gold pieces and four tens—one hundred dollars.

"By the great guns!" he exclaimed, as he gazed at the coins.

"That old man-eater was worth something."

"Bress de Lor!" exclaimed Lem, "dat was a bad un."

Sancho looked at the dead monster and crossed himself most devoutly. He was so superstitious that he did not dare to touch the contents of the fish's stomach.

A still further search brought forth a man's arm and hand complete.

Larry looked at it scrutinizingly, as if trying to identify it, and then turned away, saying to the two negroes:

"Cut out the harpoon and then throw him into the water."

"Yes, sah," said Lem, who went to work to cut out the iron.

As soon as he got the iron out he and old Sancho threw the remains of the man-eater into the water and then went into the tower, where Larry had already gone after washing all the stains off the locket.

Anita heard him coming up the stairs, and met him in the little office of the lighthouse.

"What do you think we found in that shark?" he asked as they met.

"I cannot guess," she said.

"Lem found one hundred dollars in gold, and I found this locket in some old rags in his stomach."

At the first glance at the locket she sprang forward, snatched it out of his hands, quickly opened it, and gazed at the face in it.

A wild, despairing scream escaped her, and then she sank down upon the floor in a deathlike swoon.

Larry was thunderstruck.

He rushed forward, raised her in his arms, and gazed into her face.

"My God!" he moaned, "she is dead! Oh, what shall I do?"

Just then old Sancho's wife came into the room.

She set up a yell, and Sancho and Lem came running up.

"Oh, de chile is done gone dead!" wailed the old negress.

"What's de matter?" Sancho inquired.

Larry told him in a few words.

The old man was pretty level-headed. He took a glass of water and dashed it in the face of the unconscious girl, and it acted like an electric shock. She groaned, and a moment later opened her eyes.

"You are better now?" Larry said, still holding her in his arms.

She groaned again.

"Put her in de bed," said the old negress, and Larry carried her into the little room she occupied, where he laid her on the bed.

He then left her to the care of the old negress, who undressed her and gave her a cup of hot tea.

"Dere now, honey," she said, in her kindly way. "Youse better now, an' when youse hab been ersleep youse'll be well agin."

"Oh, my poor mother, my poor mother!" groaned Anita, bursting into tears.

She wept long and hysterically, but the tears relieved her.

"Tell Mr. Lee to please let me have that locket again," she said to the old negress, and the old woman went out in search of him. She found him in the dining room talking to Lem and old Sancho.

He gave her the locket, and the old woman returned with it to the young girl's room.

A few minutes later Larry heard heart-broken sobs, and knocking at the door of her room, asked:

"What's the matter? Please tell me."

She called to him to come in, and then she told him the locket contained the portrait of her father.

"My God!" he gasped. "Is that so?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee, and now you can understand my grief."

"Indeed I do," he said, "and my heart bleeds for you. But let me tell you that the wrecker who died in the canoe last night had that locket in his possession."

"Oh, how do you know that?"

"Because it was found in his clothes in the shark's stomach. I am sure, now, that your parents were washed ashore, their bodies robbed by the wreckers, and then buried somewhere in the sand on the beach."

"Oh, if I only knew that," she said.

"I am sure of it. If they had not been washed ashore how could they have had this locket in their possession?"

"Ah! That's so. I am satisfied now. I am so glad they were not eaten by those horrid sharks. I may some day be able to find them and have them carried home."

"Yes, and I will do all in my power to help you find them. Maybe we'll catch one of the wreckers some day, and then we'll make him tell us something about them."

"Oh, you are so kind!" and she burst into tears again. Larry left the room. He was too tender-hearted to stand by and listen to the sobs of a pretty girl without joining in himself, and that was what he didn't want to do.

Going in to see the old sailor who had been rescued on the *Leonidas*, he sat down and stared out of the little window for several minutes before speaking.

"I am better this afternoon," said the old man, "and have nearly got my sea legs on again."

"I am very glad to hear that," said Larry, "but take your time about getting up again."

"Thanks, commodore," replied the old salt, "but I want to get a whiff of sea air, and am going up on deck to get it."

"Oh, you can go up on the hurricane deck if you like. We've got five decks on this craft, you know."

"Shiver my timbers, commodore," the old salt ejaculated, "an' you carry the highest headlight on the main."

"Still you couldn't keep away from it," said Larry, laughing.

"It was blowing great guns, and it took our mast away. I heard rowing nearly all night under the windows there, commodore, but couldn't see anything."

"Yes, I heard it, too, but could not find the boat."

"Did you hail it?"

"No."

"I heard some one laughing several times," added the old sailor.

"Yes, but still I could see no one. There are a lot of wreckers on the beach out there, who try to annoy us because we won't let 'em plunder the hull of the *Leonidas*. Before this light was put here they had a rich harvest of wrecks on this reef. Since then they have done but little business, and have tried to destroy the lamps. Last night they tried to kill me, I think, as two bullets whistled close by my head and broke the glass that protected the light."

"The cowardly lubbers!" hissed the old salt; "if I could get my grapnels on 'em I'd make wrecks of 'em in less time than it takes to fly a skysail!"

"They deserve to be wrecked," said Larry; "or, what is worse, to be hanged at the yardarm."

"Ay, ay, sir, that they do, and old Jack Turner is the sea dog as would like to do it, too!" and the old man went to the little window and looked out on the white stretch of beach that faded away into the horizon to the north and south of him.

Larry was satisfied as to the honesty of the old salt, and so he as-

sisted him to the top of the tower, where, seated on the balcony, the old man drank in the fresh salt air and viewed the magnificent stretch of sea view that was spread out before him.

"Is that where the wreckers live?" he asked, as he gazed at the primitive log cabins in the distance on the beach.

"Yes," replied Larry.

"How many of 'em?"

"Nearly a score, I guess," was the reply. "Three of 'em have died since I came here."

"Yellow fever?" the old man asked, innocently.

"No. It was a meddling fever that killed 'em, I believe," replied Larry.

"What's that? I've tackled everything in the way of fevers."

"Well, no one ever takes it who doesn't meddle with other people's business," said Larry.

The old sailor stared hard at him for several minutes, and then gave a low whistle, plainly indicating a vast amount of astonishment in his unsophisticated mind.

"There's a Captain Blake over there," Larry said, "who seems to be the head man of the wreckers. He came over here one evening and paid me a visit up here. When my back was turned he attacked me so suddenly that it came near being my last night on earth. I recovered however, and a desperate struggle ensued. I got the lock on him at last, and hurled him over the balcony here into the water below."

The old sailor leaned forward and looked down at the water and black rocks below.

"And the sharks got 'im?" he exclaimed.

"No. I saw him the next morning as lively as a monkey in a cocoanut tree."

Another whistle, and the old sea dog stared at the young man with an air of innocent incredulity.

CHAPTER XXI.

OLD SANCHO GOES ASHORE.

LARRY was conscious of the fact that old Jack Turner did not believe him, and remarked:

"Lem, the black man downstairs, saw him when he went over, so you can make up your mind to accept it as truth. He happened to miss the rocks, you see, and so he escaped, but how he managed is more than I can tell. At any rate, I found him with the wreckers the next day on the beach out there."

Old Jack looked down at the black rocks at the base of the tower and mentally calculated the distance. He shook his head, as though the yarn was too large for him to swallow.

"What did he attack you for?" he finally asked, looking hard at Larry.

"Because this light is ruining their business," was the reply. "If they can kill the keeper and put out the light on stormy nights, they would soon strew the beach with wrecks."

"Why, shiver my timbers, mate!" exclaimed the old sailor, greatly excited, "that's what's the matter with the cowardly lubbers, eh? Smash my binnacle light, but I'd like to get my flippers on 'em!"

"Oh, they've got the worst of it so far. My good rifle has laid out three of 'em, and I guess that now they will let me alone."

They spent two or three hours up there talking over the situation, during which time the old man explained more fully the wreck of the *Leonidas*.

Just as the sun began to sink down into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Larry proceeded to light the great lamps. The old sailor looked on with the greatest interest until the job was finished. Then he watched how the revolving machine was set in motion.

"Blow my tarry top lights!" he exclaimed, when he saw the thing going. "It's the best life-saving thing in the world!"

"Yes, it is the greatest blessing to mariners that was ever invented."

"Indeed it is."

Just then Anita came up on the balcony with that locket in her hand and silently handed it back to him. He could see that she was choking with emotion.

"Oh, you must keep it," he said, "for it is yours, you know."

"But—but—you——"

"Oh, it is yours, dear Miss Anita," he said, interrupting her. "I am ever so glad I found it for you."

She tried to thank him, but burst into tears.

He took her by the hand and led her to a seat near old Jack Turner, who looked on the whole proceeding with great interest.

In a few minutes she regained her self-possession again, and said:

"I will never forget your kindness, Mr. Lee, and——"

"Shiver my timbers if I do either, lassie!" exclaimed old Jack, "and I'll fight for him till Davy Jones boards my hulk!"

She looked round at the weather-beaten old man and said:

"Yes, we both have much to thank him for, sir, and I hope we may be able to show our appreciation of his kindness some day."

"Oh, I know how you both feel," said Larry, laughing pleasantly. "But don't talk about it. You make me feel as mean as a pirate. Just see how the light shines now."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Anita, as she looked at the light.

"I think so, too," said Larry. "It can be seen ten or fifteen miles at sea."

"It's going to be a dark night, is it not?" she asked.

"Yes, a very dark night, I think, and yet old Sancho says he's going to go ashore and see what is going on among those wreckers."

"Isn't it a dangerous thing for him to do?"

"Yes; but still he knows every inch of the country around here, and can handle his canoe as well as any old sailor. I don't know that it is very dangerous after all."

"When will he go?"

"As soon as it is dark enough to conceal his movements from the wreckers, I guess."

"I'm afraid he won't be able to keep out of harm's way. He is so old, you know."

"Yes, he's old, but he has a keen, shrewd head on his shoulders. Old Sancho is no fool."

Lem came up and told them that supper was ready. Larry led Anita down the narrow iron staircase, and old Jack followed close behind her.

After supper old Sancho went down on the rocks to look after his canoe.

Larry followed him.

"Sancho," he said to the old man, "find out all you can. It looks as if it might blow before midnight. If it does, don't try to come back to-night, but hide in the swamp till a better time."

"Yes, massa."

"Here's a revolver and some cartridges. You know how to use it."

"Yes, sah."

"You had better take some rations with you, for fear you may need them."

"Tankee, massa."

"Be careful and try not to let 'em see you or your canoe. But if they try to catch you, shoot and kill as long as you can. You are not afraid to do that, are you?"

"No, sah."

"All right, then. You can guide yourself by the light, you know."

"Yes, sah."

Larry went up in the kitchen and got some rations, which he put in a bag and brought down to him.

"Here you are, enough for two days," he said as he dropped the bag into the canoe.

"Tankee, massa," replied the old man, taking up the oars and pulling away.

In a few minutes he was out of sight, though Larry could hear his cautious strokes for some time after he left.

But when he could no longer hear him, Larry went up to the balcony under the light to wait and listen.

After awhile Anita came up and sat with him. She was too lonely down below. The air was so cool and pleasant up on the balcony.

"Old Sancho has gone," he said to her, as she came up, "and I am sitting here waiting to see if I can hear anything from him on the beach."

"Why, you surely don't expect to hear from him, do you?"

"Well, not if he gets through without any trouble," he replied.

"But if those wreckers hear from him and try to stop him, I will certainly hear his revolver, for the old man is game. He'll shoot quicker'n lightning."

"Yes, I think he is a brave old man," said she. "He went out in

the swamp one day and killed a big black bear with nothing but a knife."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and we lived on bear meat for nearly a month."

"How did you like it?"

"Oh, I liked it very well. It was a change from our regular fare and was a welcome one."

"I suppose it was."

Let us now follow old Sancho in his trip to the beach.

He pulled steadily, keeping his face to the light, and in due time came in view of the low, white, pebbly beach.

But there were three wreckers there to meet him.

They suspected that some one would try to reach the shore under the cover of night, particularly old Sancho, who was so familiar with the country about there. Having no boats left, they resolved to watch and capture anything that came from the lighthouse.

As they were walking the beach, they heard the sound of his oars and quickly ran to the spot where they expected him to land.

But, luckily for the old man, he saw dark forms on the white sand and drew back just before the canoe stuck its nose on the beach.

A second look revealed to him the presence of three men.

He knew they could be no other than wreckers.

There were no other people there at the time, so he could make no mistake as to their character.

He looked and thought he could see guns in their hands, dark as it was.

"Come ashore!" commanded a harsh, gruff voice.

Sancho quietly laid down at full length in the canoe, with one hand over in the water, with which he tried to paddle back into deep water and out of sight of the wreckers.

"Come ashore!" commanded the same voice, very roughly, again, "or we'll fire!"

Sancho made no reply, but kept using his hand as an oar.

Bang! went a rifle.

The bullet struck the canoe, but the old darky was unharmed.

He continued to use his natural oar, and slowly drew back from the beach.

"Caramba!" growled a Spaniard on the beach.

"Perdition!" hissed another. "He is getting away from us! Give him the other two!"

Bang—bang! went two more rifles, and the bullets went so low over the canoe that Sancho felt the wind of them on his neck.

"Herè, hold my gun!" cried a voice, "and I'll wade in and bring him ashore!"

A moment later Sancho heard a man rushing through the water.

Nearer and nearer he came, and deeper and deeper in the wrecker waded till the water was up about his waist.

He laid a hand on the canoe and pulled it towards him.

Crack! went a revolver from the middle of the canoe, and the wrecker staggered back with an oath and a groan.

CHAPTER XXII.

BRAVE OLD SANCHE.

THE wrecker had waded into the canoe without taking any weapon with him save a knife.

The idea of meeting with resistance under such circumstances never once occurred to him.

But the bullet from old Sancho's revolver had not been sent to a vital part, and so as soon as the wounded wrecker recovered from his surprise the struggle was renewed.

He seized the canoe, and, savagely jerking it forward, peered into it to see where the shot came from.

Old Sancho did not wait to let him find out his locality. He raised his revolver and fired again, this time not more than five feet from him.

Another fierce oath, followed by a groan, told that he was hard hit. He staggered away toward his companions.

Sancho reached over the side of the canoe and commenced paddling with his hand again.

Just as the wounded wrecker reached the shore he fell to the ground moaning.

"Ten thousand maledictions!" hissed a voice. "He is hurt, Donald! Let's shoot the wretch to pieces?"

"Yes—give him every bullet," returned the other.

Of course Sancho heard every word that was said.

He quickly drew his hand in and laid low in the bottom of the canoe, determined to give them no chance to hurt him if he could help it.

Crack—crack—crack! came the revolvers, and the bullets whistled all around the old darky. Several of them struck the canoe, but old Sancho remained unharmed.

By and by the firing ceased, and Sancho knew that their revolvers were empty. He sprang up, seized an oar and made several vigorous pulls, which sent him out of sight of the wretches in a few seconds.

"Bress de Lor," said the old man, "I'se got away from dem dis time. I'se gwine to go up de creek, where I kin hide de canoe in de swamp."

Looking back at the light, so as to get his bearing, the old man pulled for the upper part of the beach, where a creek connected the swamp with the sea. He knew every inch of the locality, and had no fear but that he could make the mouth of the creek without any difficulty.

After pulling for an hour, he concluded that he must be near his destination, and turned toward the beach to make sure of his calculations.

He had not gone far before the canoe grated against a pole stuck in the mud at the bottom.

He caught hold of the pole and made an examination of it with his hands, and pretty soon recognized it as one he had stuck there to attach a fish basket to.

Of course he knew just where he was then, for he had planted the pole directly in the mouth of the river, or creek, and now made it his guide to reach the point he had started for.

Pulling carefully, so as to make no noise, he made his way up the creek till he reached the bushes and high grass. Then he ran into a spot he knew by an old dead cypress tree that he saw outlined against the sky and landed.

"I'se gwine ter go down by de ole place now," he muttered, and, securing the canoe so it would not get away from him, he wended his way through the bushes to the sandy beach.

But he knew enough not to go along the open beach and run the risk of meeting some of the wreckers. That was what he wanted to avoid. He didn't come ashore to fight or kill anyone. He came for another purpose altogether, so he kept back from the beach and made his way along the edge of the swamp, which ran parallel with the beach about a quarter of a mile inland.

When he came to the path that led to the little spot where his little cabin had once stood, he could not resist the temptation to see the place.

Creeping along with his revolver in his hand, ready for any emergency, he soon reached the spot. Every inch of the locality was familiar to him, dark as it was, and he took a melancholy pleasure in moving around among the trees and in the very ashes where his cabin once stood.

Suddenly he heard a fierce growl on his left.

It was too dark for him to see any wild beast, so he quickly retreated towards the open, not caring to fight a panther or bear in the dark.

Much to his delight, the beast did not pursue him. He had seen all that he cared to see, and so went away satisfied.

Out on the sand again, he crept southward toward the cabins of the wreckers, some two miles below.

When he had gone a half mile or so, he thought he saw a small light in the swamp. He was perfectly familiar with the "will-o'-the-wisp" light of swamps, and knew that this was not of that kind.

The "will-o'-the-wisp" light is always oblong in shape, but this one was smaller and more like a candle or a small lantern.

He stopped and gazed at it, and noticed that it was moved about as if in the hands of a man.

"Dat's dem wreckers, suah," he muttered, and his curiosity urged him to go forward and see what was being done. He started in, but the yielding mud made so much noise as he pulled his feet out for each step that he knew he would be discovered and murdered, so he resolved to hold back and wait until they came out, locating the spot as well as he could in the dark.

He waited there for over an hour before he noticed the light approaching him.

Concealing himself in the edge of the swamp, he waited till they came out.

There were four men. They carried a small ship's lantern, which gave sufficient light for them to see how to travel.

When they passed near him he saw that an ax and spade were carried by two of them.

"Yes," said one, "it's safe enough till we move it altogether."

"Yes," added another, "but how will we ever be able to move it in sight of yonder light and the young fend in charge of it?"

"We've got to move it," said a third, "or lose it. I, for one, will not lose my share."

"Neither will I."

Another said something, but they had gone to far away for old Sancho to catch it. He moved on after them, however, resolved to see and hear all he could, now that he was on land with them. Yet he dared not go near enough to them on the beach to overhear their conversation. If they should turn and discover him, nothing could save him from their revolvers. They would literally fill him with lead.

He kept them in sight, or rather the light, till they reached the cabins.

Then, when they entered, he went up and peeped through the crevices and saw more than he had ever before seen of the wreckers of the Florida reefs.

He saw in one cabin seven men, bronzed by sun and wind, sitting around a large sea chest, which answered the purpose of a table, talking in low tones.

On a bed in another room two men lay wounded. They were groaning and cursing their ill fortune in being laid up with wounds, and vowed to wreak a terrible vengeance on the young lighthouse keeper as soon as they got well again.

But the party at the sea chest attracted the old man's attention the most.

He saw Captain Blake give two men a sum of money in bright gold coins, saying as he did so:

"Go down the coast till you find some way of getting over to Key West, and buy there a sailboat large enough to take us and the box to some other point."

"Is it settled then that we must leave here, captain?" one of them asked.

"Of course it is. How long do you think we will be permitted to stay here after that young fellow over there makes his report to the government? I've got better sense than to have the government send a detachment of troops to arrest me and then swing for work done here. Oh, no, I'm not a fool, Donald."

There was a silence of several minutes, during which time old Sancho heard several oaths hurled at young Larry Lee for having ruined the business of the wreckers.

"When shall we start?" one of the two men who had received the gold asked of the captain of the wreckers.

"At daylight," was the reply.

"All right. We'll fix up our rations to-night then," and they at once arose and began to prepare rations for a week to take along with them.

One of them came out of the cabin so suddenly that the old man was compelled to take to his heels to prevent being seen.

But the wrecker got a glimpse of a dark form running away, and called out:

"Halt there!"

But he only ran the faster, and the wrecker drew a revolver and fired.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD SANCHO'S ESCAPE.

The bullet whistled uncomfortably close to old Sancho's head.

But it only made him run the faster. In the soft sand he made no noise, and in a minute or two he was out of sight.

He stopped to look back and saw the wreckers following his trail in the sand by the aid of a ship's lantern.

"Afo' de Lor!" he muttered, "I'se gwinter go back to de light. Dem wreckers am de debbil, suah," and he made good speed toward the creek, nearly three miles away toward the north, where his old canoe was hidden in the bushes.

Looking back every few minutes, he saw the light of the ship's lan-

tern following steadily on his trail. He well knew the relentless ferocity of those men, and so he made haste to get away.

He reached the creek some distance below the spot where he had left his canoe, and had to run along the margin of the swamp till he saw the old cypress which had acted as a guide in effecting a landing.

When he reached the canoe the wreckers were not more than an eighth of a mile from him.

Jumping into the old dugout, he pushed off and made his way downstream as fast as the oars could send him.

As the wreckers followed his trail along the margin of the swamp, they came within pistol shot of him as he floated towards the outlet. He rested on his oars, however, so as not to attract attention.

In a few minutes they reached the spot where his canoe had been, and then discovered that the spy had escaped.

They swore like pirates and bewailed their lack of boats, for then they could pursue and destroy him before he could give away the information that he had picked up.

In the meantime, old Sancho pulled as hard as he could for the light, knowing that he would not really be safe until he reached that place.

When he came within hailing distance he looked up and saw Larry and Anita sitting on the balcony under the light, and called out:

"All right, massa!"

"Is that you, Sancho?" Larry called out from the balcony.

"Yes, sah! Ole Sancho come back!"

"All right. I'll be down in a few minutes," and then turning to Anita, Larry said:

"Stay here till I come back. I think the old man has some news, or he would not have returned so soon."

"I will wait," she said, "but come back soon."

He ran down several flights of stairs and opened the door for the old man.

Dem was called down to help him secure the canoe so the tide would not take it away, and then the old darky related the story of his adventures with the wreckers.

Larry was a patient listener, and only interrupted the old man to ask a question about a point on which he was not particularly clear.

When he had finished, Larry grasped his hand and said:

"Sancho, I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for your trip to-night. You don't know how much good you have done. I guess you laid out that fellow on the beach there."

"Guess I did, massa," said the old man.

"Well, you did right, anyhow, and did just as I would have done, and you did it bravely, too. You are good game, old man."

"Tankee, massa. I didn't want dem wreckers to git a hol' on me. Dey's de debbil on poor niggers, dey is."

"Well, we've found out one thing that we wanted to know—they are going to leave this coast just as soon as they can get away."

"Yes, sah—dat's fac'."

"Well, we won't hinder them from going, but we'll see if we can't find their treasure first and get it before they do. I guess it would make us right well off in this world's goods."

"Yes, massa, I spec' it would."

"Well, we'll talk it over to-morrow, and then see if we can't locate the spot where you saw them go into the swamp."

"I knows whar dey come out," he said. "Dunno whar dey went in, sah."

"Oh, one will do as well as the other, I guess," said Larry. "If you can locate the spot where they come out I think we can find the rest without any trouble."

"I knows de spot, massa," said the old man; "but youse got ter watch dem wreckers, suah. Dey am de wustest people in de worl'."

"I know they are pretty bad, Sancho," replied Larry, "but then we are a pretty hard crowd ourselves, you know."

The old man gave him a smile that told how well he was understood. He recollected how badly the wreckers had fared at the hands of Larry Lee since he had been placed in charge of the lighthouse, and wondered if the wreckers didn't really think he was a "hard crowd."

Larry went back up to the balcony where Anita was waiting for him and reported to her all the news that had been brought by old Sancho.

She was very liberal in her admiration of the old man, and said:

"I will give him a pension if I ever get home to my people. He and his old wife have been more kind to me than I can tell."

"Yes, and your keen appreciation of their kindness shows how kind you are," he said. "I join you fully in your kind feelings toward the old couple. Their home has been destroyed, and they are too old to build another. I think, from what he has told me to-night, that I can find the hidden treasure of those rascals, and if I do the old man shall have a share of it, no matter what the amount may be."

"Oh, I do hope that you may find it, and that it may make you rich enough to leave this business and live a life of ease and comfort."

"So do I," was the candid reply of the brave young fellow.

"Hush-sh!" said Anita. "I hear a boat coming."

Larry listened and heard the steady pull of a pair of oars between him and the shore. Ten minutes passed, and still the mysterious oarsman neither advanced nor receded.

"Ah!" he said. "I know that fellow. He'll not come any closer, but will keep up his interminable rowing until daylight, as if trying to tempt me to row out and meet him. But I won't go, and he laughs mockingly at me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a mocking laugh from below.

"That's him now," said Larry.

"Oh, you won't go, will you?" she cried.

"Oh, no! I am not to be caught in a trap like that," he replied.

She really believed it was a man in a boat who had come to tempt the young lighthouse keeper from his post in order to murder him, and felt great relief when he informed her that he would not be tempted out.

The roaring continued for another hour, broken at intervals by the harsh, mocking laugh, of which the reader already knows.

But the incessant roaring began to annoy Larry. It grated harshly on his ears, and he grew restless.

"Last night," he said to Anita, "when I threw that dead duck over into the water the roaring ceased, and I heard nothing more of it."

"Maybe he came after something to eat," suggested Anita.

Larry smiled and wondered if the ghosts of dead wreckers ate wild ducks.

"There's two ducks down in the kitchen which Lem killed this afternoon," she continued. "Suppose you throw one of them to him and see if he will go away."

"Yes, I believe I will," and he ran down into the kitchen, whence he returned a couple of minutes later, bringing one of the ducks with him.

"Here it is," he said, "all dressed and ready to cook for dinner to-morrow."

"Oh, no matter," she said, "we can have something else in the place of it."

"Well, here goes," and, taking the duck by the leg, he hurled it as far out in the direction of the mysterious rower as he could.

They listened, and the moment it struck the water the rowing ceased.

"There!" exclaimed Anita, greatly relieved, "he has stopped! Now he will go away. He ought to be thankful that he got a duck all dressed for the oven."

They waited to see if they could hear anything of the mysterious rower, but he remained silent. Larry was as much surprised as Anita was gratified, and said:

"Now you'd better go down to your room and get some sleep, as it is after midnight."

"Oh, I didn't know it was so late!" and, bidding him good-night, she ran down to her little room, and was soon in the land of dreams.

"Hanged if I can understand this thing," said Larry, when he was alone. "That spook comes rowing around here and laughing at me just because he knows it is not pleasant to have such unpleasant laughter breaking in on one at all hours of the night, and when I throw a dead duck at him he gets up and scampers back to Davy Jones' as fast as Old Nick will let him. I don't understand it, nohow. Maybe a duck makes 'em sick. Maybe it doesn't agree with 'em. Anyhow, I'll give 'em a duck hereafter and put a stop to this annoyance."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DARING HUNT FOR TREASURE.

ANOTHER day dawned, and all nature seemed to have agreed to remain quiet, for the wind was still and the gulf looked like an immense

liquid mirror. Larry looked around on the quiet scene, and knew that he would have but little work to do that day.

Lem announced breakfast, and he went down to find Anita presiding at the little table like a veritable queen of the breakfast table.

"Good-morning!" she greeted.

"Good-morning!" he returned, thinking her the prettiest picture he had ever seen. "Such a lovely morning I have seldom seen."

"Yes, I was admiring it from the window when dressing," she said.

"How I wish I could run in the woods and gather flowers this morning."

He gazed at her a minute or two, and thought how much pleasure it would give him to escort her to the forest to see her gather the wild flowers, none of which could be more beautiful than herself.

"How I would like to take you to the woods," he remarked, "but it is too dangerous, you know."

"Oh, yes. I wouldn't think of going while those bad people remained on the beach out there."

"Well, they won't remain there always," he said. "They are preparing to go away, for Sancho heard their leader instructing two of them to go down the coast and get to Key West as best they could, and buy a sail vessel large enough to take them and their plunder away. Even if they don't get off that way, the government supply boat will look after them when it comes."

"But when will it come?"

"Next month."

"Oh, that will soon be here."

"Yes—all too soon for me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, I shall lose you, and be so lonesome after you are gone."

Anita looked down at her plate and made no reply. Larry himself relapsed into a silence that was broken only by the contact of knives and forks with their plates.

Both were thinking, and both had thoughts they were afraid to give utterance to.

The meal ended, Larry arose and went up to the balcony, examined the lamps, as the regulations required, and then went down to his room for the sleep he was so much in need of.

In the meantime Lem and old Sancho, under the supervision of old Jack Turner, were busily engaged in removing portions of the cargo of the wrecked Leonidas, and storing it in the lower part of the tower.

They were engaged at that work when the young lighthouse keeper awoke.

Anita busied herself in helping old Sancho's wife put things to rights in the little rooms in the tower.

Larry came down and found everybody busy, and made himself useful in many ways about the wreck.

Old Jack Turner managed to get the manifest of the ill-fated vessel, though greatly damaged by water, and gave it to Larry for safe-keeping.

"You can take better care of it than I can, commodore," he said.

"I can keep it as long as the lighthouse stands," said Larry, taking the papers and laying them away in a safe place, after drying them.

But Larry was thinking about the buried treasure of the wreckers, which, he was now fully satisfied, was buried in two places.

The report made by old Sancho, and the confession of the dying wrecker about something being buried under a certain rock at low tide, fully convinced him that a vast amount could be recovered if he could rightly locate it.

It was upon this he now bent all the energies of his mind.

Taking his spyglass up to the balcony with him, he got old Sancho to give him all the points by which he could find the spot where the wreckers came out of the swamp.

Sancho located the spot by pointing out a tree under which he was standing when they emerged from the swamp.

"They'll turn out all their strength to-night," he said to Sancho, "to guard against another visit. They have good reason to fear that you were watching so as to locate their box in the swamp, and will conceal themselves all about the creek to-night to watch for you or me, or some of us."

"Yes, sah; reckon dey will," said the old man.

"Of course they will, for you gave them a big scare last night, and they tracked you way back up to the creek. They'll lay for you

there after this. Now, I'm going to land away down there below the cabins to-night when the tide is out."

"Good Lor', massa!" ejaculated the old darkey, his eyes opening as wide as saucers, "dey'll kotch yer, shuah!"

"Oh, no danger. You and I will go together, and take Lem along to hold the boat off."

Old Sancho was proud to be thus chosen as a faithful body-guard, and was much more than willing to go. He was anxious to go and show the daring young hero how true he could be in the hour of danger.

He took all the afternoon to prepare the rifle and revolvers for the expedition.

Larry took Anita up to the balcony, and explained to her the whole plan he had mapped out for the night's work.

"I will leave you in charge of the light," he said, "with Jack Turner as your man-of-all work. I will be gone only three or four hours. All you will have to do will be to sit up here and listen for our signal, when you can send Jack down to open the door for us. Will you take charge of the light for me?"

"Yes," she said, "and will do all I can to aid you. But if you do not return—if you—get—killed? What shall I do then?"

"Take charge of everything till the supply boat comes. Lem will work the lamps. He knows all about them. But I'm not going to get hurt. I'll come back all right. Never fear about that."

"Oh, I will hope and pray for you till I hear you returning," she said.

"Don't get excited about anything, but keep cool. Remember that no one can get inside unless you open the door. If you hear any more of that rowing we heard last night, throw out another duck and he will go away."

"But there isn't another duck in the tower."

"Oh, well, we'll get half a dozen this afternoon," and he went down and got his duck-gun, with which he returned to the balcony, where ducks were constantly passing on the wing.

He did not have to wait long ere a flock of ducks came by, and a shot brought down four of them. They fell into the water. Lem ran down, launched a small rowboat, and secured them.

"Now you will have ducks enough and to spare," he said, as Lem brought them into the little kitchen.

"Oh, yes, and I'll give them all to the man if he wants them," she said.

"Give him one at a time, and see if he will leave with the first one."

She promised to do just as he told her, and then Larry took old Jack Turner into his confidence, and told him his plans for the night.

The old salt wanted to go with him, but Larry told him he must remain behind to protect the young lady.

His gallantry thus appealed to, he consented, and then the young lighthouse keeper explained the case to Lem.

"De Lor' Goramity!" exclaimed Lem. "Youse'll be a dead gone white man fo' suah, Marse Larry."

"Now don't think I don't know what I'm doing, Lem," said Larry. "I tell you there's no danger. Sancho will go with me, and you stand off with the boat ready for any danger. They will all be off up the creek to-night, watching for Sancho and his canoe."

The night set in very cloudy and dark. Low tide was reached at ten o'clock, at which time the three set off in a lifeboat, rowing so as not to make any noise in the rowlocks.

It took them nearly an hour to reach the spot where they wanted to land.

Larry and old Sancho got out and crept forward to the cabins, and found them deserted except by the wounded, who lay upon their beds talking to each other.

The others had gone up towards the creek and opposite the lighthouse, hoping to be able to capture old Sancho should he attempt to land again.

Satisfied on that point, Larry touched old Sancho's arm and whispered:

"Come away to the beach," and led the way himself.

Sancho followed, and soon they were walking together along the water's edge in search of a rock that would look as though placed there by the hands of man.

They examined a dozen rocks, and at last Larry found one that seemed flat.

He ran the end of a sharp rod of iron underneath it.

"Ah! This must be it!" he said, "as it simply lies under the surface," and he ran the pointed iron underneath again.

It stuck in some kind of hard wood.

"Hash-sh!" cautioned Sancho, and both men laid flat down on the wet sand.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WORK OF A NIGHT.

CROUCHING low, neither Larry nor old Sancho could see the two men, though they could hear them talking. As the strangers' voices became more distinct with almost every word, it was plain that they were approaching the spot where the daring lighthouse keeper and old Sancho were squatting.

"Draw your revolver, Sancho," whispered Larry to the old man, "we may have to settle 'em if they come too close upon us."

"Yes, massa," whispered the faithful old black, "I'se ready for 'em."

"So am I. Wait till I fire."

Larry knew he could depend upon the old man, for he was not only

game, but had nursed an undying hatred against the wreckers for the murder of his son.

Dark as it was, Larry could locate the two men by the sound of their voices. He could have raised his revolver and shot down one of the speakers without much trouble, so near were they to him.

But they came nearer still, so near, in fact, that they could be seen in the gloom of the night. Their dark forms were outlined against the sky of the horizon and the white sand of the beach.

They walked up to the flat stone which Larry and old Sancho had just been examining, and stood still for several minutes.

One of them stood on the stone.

"It's all right, Larry heard one say to the other. "No buried treasure ever concealed its traces more than this. The high tide covers it, and the low tide leaves only smooth sand and a stone to tell of its existence. When the sailboat comes we will take it up and go away."

"Yes," added the other, "and I think we'd better be content with what we have, and go to some other part of the world and enjoy it."

"Just what I was thinking," remarked the first speaker. "It's very plain that this Manatee Light will kill the business."

"Of course it will. It has done that already, but I would give half of my share to get one good shot at that keeper over there."

"Ah! So would I! But I am not going away without making an effort to get one. I am quite sure I can bring him down on a dark night, when he is attending to the lamps. Had that fellow been a good shot, Lee would have been dead, and the light in our possession."

"He's a sharp chap, though."

"Yes, he has to be. That old rascal, Sancho, has given him many points on us, which he is smart enough to make use of, but we'll get aboard of him yet. Let's go back to the hut and have some rum. Everything is all right here."

The two men then strolled off up the beach towards the huts. Larry and old Sancho remained in their crouching positions till the sound of their voices could no longer be heard.

"They have gone back," whispered Larry to the old man. "I am glad they came, for they have located the treasure for us. All we have to do now is to dig it up and carry it to the lighthouse."

"Yes, marsa."

"Well, let's see how deep down in the sand it is," and Larry led the way to the rock again, where he probed the sand.

He found that there was a box or something scarcely three feet down below the surface.

"We can't get it up before the tide comes in again," whispered Larry to old Sancho.

"I'se mighty good at diggin', Marse Larry," replied the old man, "an' I'se strong, too, I is."

"Do you think you can get down to it in an hour?"

"Yes, sah, sooner'n dat."

"Well, let's try it, then. If we can't, we can cover it up and let the water smooth it over again."

Old Sancho waded out to the boat and got picks and spades, which had been provided, and returned to the spot.

The first thing to do was to remove the stone, which they did by their united strength, and then the old man went to work with the spade.

He made the sand fly. No ditcher in the bogs of old Ireland ever threw such spadefuls of earth in such rapid succession as he did.

Larry watched him with the greatest interest, till he heard the spade strike against a hard substance.

"Dar it am!" whispered the old man, scooping up spade after spade full of water, which oozed from the sand very fast.

"Go ahead—don't stop!" said Larry. "The tide will be coming in presently."

Old Sancho laid himself down to the work, and soon cleared all the sand from the top of the box—which seemed to be an iron-bound chest some three feet in length by two feet in width.

"Can you clear the sand from around it?" Larry asked.

"Yes, sah," answered Sancho, wiping the great drops of perspiration from his face, and going at it again.

It was hard work, but the old man threw the wet sand as he had never thrown it before.

When he had got down pretty low around the chest, he put a point of a pick underneath of it and loosened it in its place.

"Git de boat hook, Marse Larry," said Sancho.

Larry waded out to the boat, got the hook, and towed the boat to the beach, where he ordered Lem to get out and assist in raising the heavy chest to the surface.

"Quick," he said. "The water will be in the hole in ten minutes."

Lem and old Sancho got down and got the two picks underneath the box. Then Larry took the boat hook, and the three put their united strength to the task.

"Up it comes!" said Larry, in a whisper. "Look out! Don't let it get back! Steady—steady—there! Roll it over—that's it!" and the chest was turned over on its side, on the brink of the excavation.

"Here comes the water," said Larry, as the water from the rising tide began to trickle down into the hole. "It may come as fast as it wants to now."

It began to run faster, and in a very few minutes it was filled with water.

"Now, Lem," said Larry, taking up a spade and handing it to the black, "help me fill it up again."

He took another spade, and in a few minutes the hole was pretty well filled with sand.

"Now, let's place the rock right back where it was."

They lifted it back to its place, and distributed the sand so as to leave no traces of their visit behind them.

"The waves will smooth it over," said Larry. "We want to get that chest into the boat."

"We kin do dat," said Lem, dragging the boat on the sand toward the spot where the treasure lay.

"Be careful now," cautioned Larry. "The least noise will be heard and will excite suspicion. We must not let it strike against the boat, nor drop into it."

They took hold of it and lifted it up. It weighed over two hundred pounds, but all three were strong, hearty men, and their united strength was equal to the task.

They lifted it into the boat and let it down easy till it rested safely on the bottom.

"Now, let's pull it off the sand."

All three caught hold of the boat and pulled—pulled hard, and together they moved it till it floated in the rising tide.

"Ah, we are all right now," said Larry. "Get in, and we will pull for the light."

They got in and took up the oars. Of course they pulled so as not to make any noise, and in less than one hour they were under the Manatee Lighthouse.

"Is it you, Mr. Lee?" Anita called, from the window of her room.

"Yes, and we have been successful," he replied.

She sent the old sailor down to open the door for them, following a minute or two later herself.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed, as she came out on the rocks to meet him. "And you didn't have any trouble with those horrid people?"

"No, they didn't see us," he replied, as he stepped out of the boat and grasped her hand. "We found their buried treasure and dug it up. It's in the boat, there, in a strong box."

"Oh, Heaven be praised!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad, for your sake."

"Thank you, Miss Anita," he said, and then turned and assisted Lem and Sancho in landing the box.

They succeeded in getting it out on the rocks, and then attached ropes to it, and dragged it inside the tower. After that they brought in the boat and fastened the door.

"Now, get the chisel and hammer, Lem," ordered Larry, "and we will see what we have got here after all our trouble. It must be valuable, or so much pains to conceal it would not have been taken."

Lem soon procured the necessary tools and brought them to his young master, who took them and proceeded to open the strong box.

But it was not an easy task.

The salt water had rusted the iron bands till the ends could not be found, so he had to cut through them, which was a tedious task.

But at last the opening was made, and heads were bumped together in their eagerness to see the contents of the box.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WRECKERS' TREASURE BOX—THE MYSTERIOUS OARSMAN AGAIN.

EXCLAMATIONS of surprise and wonder burst from everyone. Gold and silver and precious stones lay in a glittering pile before them. None of them had ever seen such a sight before.

No wonder they were dazzled.

Diamonds flashed back the light of the solitary lantern, only making it a thousand times brighter.

Only Anita Narcissa had seen diamonds before and knew something of their value.

Larry had only heard of them, and was elated beyond expression when he heard her exclaim:

"Diamonds! Oh, look at the diamonds!"

"Which are the diamonds?" he asked, for there were rubies and emeralds and other precious stones among them.

"Why, these bright ones!" she exclaimed, picking up a large one and holding it up to the light so its flashes flooded the room with light.

"Just see how it sparkles! Oh, what a beauty it is! Why, it's worth two or three thousand dollars!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Larry, in profound amazement. "That little thing worth three thousand dollars!"

"Why, yes—maybe more. I've seen diamonds about twice as large sell for ten thousand dollars."

"What is one of that size worth?" he asked, taking up a smaller one, and holding it up to the light.

"It must be worth nearly a thousand dollars," she replied.

"And this?"

He held up a ruby.

"That's a ruby. They are very valuable, but not so much as diamonds. This is an emerald, and this an amethyst—all precious stones. Why, these stones are worth a large fortune alone."

"And the gold and silver is another one," he remarked.

"Tank de Lor," murmured old Sancho, as he looked on the glittering heap in the box. "Dem wreckers ain't done got nuffin' lef' for dem."

"Oh, I think you are mistaken about that, Sancho," said Larry. "They've got lots of treasure concealed about their huts, I think."

"And in the swamp, too," added Anita.

"Oh, yes, they've got something hidden in that swamp. We've seen 'em going there with a lantern several times. We'll find out all about

it yet, and get it as we did this. You and Lem shall have enough to take care of you in your old age, so you will not have to work."

"Bress de Lor!"

"Glory, hallelujah!" sung out Lem.

"We are all rich together," added Larry, as he took up a handful of gold coins and let them fall back into the box with a clear ring that only gold sends forth. "There's money enough here for all of us."

The old sailor, who was the sole survivor of the ill-fated Leonidas, looked up and asked:

"Do you mean me, too, commodore?"

"Of course I do, old man. I wouldn't leave you out. You did your duty where I placed you."

Tears came into the old man's eyes, and he grasped Larry's hand.

"Commodore," he said, "I will sail no more, then. The old salt will anchor in some snug port and rest."

"I am glad you can do that, old man. You've sailed long enough. You ought to have some rest. We must now carry this box upstairs to my room."

Sancho and Lem, aided by Larry and the old sailor, succeeded, after a deal of hard work, in getting it up to his room, where he intended to count the coins as soon as he could get the chance, or have Anita count them.

When he reached the balcony of the lighthouse he found the sky overcast and the sea moaning dismally, as if some elementary change was about to take place.

Anita went upstairs with him.

She, too, detected the sudden change that had taken place in less than an hour's time.

"Is it going to storm?" she asked.

"Yes, I am afraid it is."

"Afraid! Is there any danger?" she asked.

"Oh, no—not to us; this tower is as safe as the everlasting hills. You need not have any fears as to our safety. I only used the word 'afraid' because I dislike inclement weather, you know."

"Oh, yes—so do I," and she was satisfied with his explanation. "I came up to talk with you."

"Thank you. I will examine the lamps, and will be through in a few minutes."

She seated herself on the little, low seat, just under the great reflector, and waited for him to join her, which he soon did.

"I wanted to ask you," she said, as soon as he was seated by her side, "when you think the supply boat will be here?"

"It will be here in three or four weeks," he replied, "but really I could wish it would not come for as many months."

"Why, Mr. Lee?"

"I know it's selfish in me to talk that way," he said, "but when I think about you going away, I cannot help it."

A bright, happy look came into her face.

"Oh," she said, "you can come and see me in my home, where I will tell everybody how kind you have been to me. You will come to see me, will you not?"

"Do you want me to?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I do. You have been so good to me, and—"

"Then I will come," he said. "You—you—won't—get married before I come, will you?"

"No, indeed. I will wait till you come, so you can be at the wedding," and she gave a merry, silvery laugh that made his heart flutter like a bird in a cage.

Poor Larry loved the sweet girl with all the strength of his strong, manly nature, but he could not muster up courage enough to tell her so. He wanted to, but dared not.

How many brave men in all ages have thus trembled before the idols of their hearts, when they would have fearlessly charged a battery belching death at every discharge!

"Oh, you'll be rich enough to leave the lighthouse now," she said, after her little laugh, "and you can come over to Cuba to see me. How happy I will be in showing you my beautiful home, and return the kindness you have shown me here. Poor old Sancho and his wife! I never want to part from them! I want to ask if you will let them go with me when the supply boat comes?"

"Oh, yes, if they want to go."

"They will go with me. But for them I would have been sleeping in the muck of yonder swamp to-night."

"Yes, yes! I don't blame you. I am glad, for their sakes, that you will take care of them in their old age."

"They will have enough to keep them comfortable all their lives," she said. "But they will need somebody to look after them to keep them from being deprived of their money."

"Why, what a business head you have!" he exclaimed, laughing good-naturedly.

"Oh, yes. I really think I have a tact for business," and she again indulged in a little merry laugh, that seemed to come from her very heart.

Suddenly a blinding flash of lightning came, followed almost immediately by a peal of thunder that shook earth and sea.

"Oh, mercy!" she exclaimed, darting to her feet.

He grasped her by the hand and held her.

"Don't get frightened," he said, holding to her hand.

"Oh, I am so nervous!" she replied, trembling from head to foot.

"Well, you should not be. Just sit down and compose yourself," and he pulled her down on the seat again.

"I always was afraid of lightning," she said. "I don't know why. I guess it's because it comes so sudden and in such blinding flashes."

"Yes, and because you are more delicately constituted than men are."

"I suppose so. Just listen how the sea moans!"

"Yes, the waves are beginning to run high. Pretty soon they will be dashing over the rocks below there, and sending the spray almost up to the light, but this tower is like the eternal rocks on which it stands, and can stand all the assaults of the ocean."

"How glad I am that I am not in a vessel to-night! Ugh! I shudder at the very thought of such a thing! I never want to go on board a ship again, though I suppose I will have to, else I can never reach my home in Cuba."

"Oh, you might go to sea a dozen times again without experiencing any rough weather. I—"

"Hark! Do you hear that?"

"What?"

"Listen! I hear oars—some one is coming from the shore!"

Larry listened, and distinctly heard the sound of oars, as though some one was really pulling for the lighthouse from the shore.

"Oh, that's the mysterious oarsman; nobody would dare come out here just now. In fact, no boat could well live in that sea now!"

"Please let me go downstairs," said Anita, trembling from head to foot, and looking very pale.

"Of course; I think you have been sitting up too late, anyhow; sleep will do you good," and he led her to the top of the stairs, where he bade her good-night.

She hurried down to her little room, and closed the small window that looked out upon the gulf, in order to shut out the glare of the lightning as well as the sound of the oars.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DIVIDING THE TREASURE.

ONCE more alone in charge of his light, young Larry Lee stood on the balcony and gazed out over the dark waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The waves were breaking over the reefs with a wild, furious rush that covered the surface with a snow-white foam.

The sound of oars grew louder with the roar of the waves, as if to be sure of being heard by the young lighthouse keeper.

The roar of the waves increased with every minute, and still the sound of those mysterious oars continued to come to the ears of Larry Lee, accompanied at times by a mocking laugh. Said Larry:

"Oh, pull away! Laugh as much as you please! I've got the treasure box. That's all I want. I can afford to laugh myself now."

The mocking laugh came up to him, though, through the roar of old ocean, and Larry could not but wish that the mystery would be drowned in the wild waves, and never be heard from again.

Suddenly he thought of the duck, and went below to the kitchen in search of one. He found several, which had been killed or caught by Lem. Taking one in his hand he reascended to the balcony and hurled it as far out into the raging sea as he could.

The moment it struck the water the mocking laugh subsided, and the sound of oars was heard no more.

"Hanged if you don't risk more for a duck than I would," muttered Larry, as he listened to ascertain if the mysterious rower was satisfied with his gift. "I don't understand it, but I'll have a duck for you every night if I can get one."

The storm increased in tenfold severity during the next hour.

"I'm glad this has come," he muttered, after examining the light again. "It will wash away our tracks on the beach where we got the treasure box of the wreckers; they will not suspect its loss nor undertake to dig it up till they are ready to move away from this coast; that will give me time to hunt up that treasure in the swamp. I am sure they have something concealed there which they guard very closely. Old Sancho can help me find it or he can do it himself; he's a long-headed old darky, and isn't afraid of the devil himself if he has anything to fight him with."

The night passed, and the storm passed away with it. Larry saw a number of ship lights, and knew that the Manatee Light had saved several vessels from being cast into the hands of the wreckers.

The sun rose bright and clear, but the ocean was still lashed into foam by angry waves; the water rushed over the reefs with a mighty roar, but the young lighthouse keeper looked on the scene like one who had been reared to regard it as an everyday occurrence.

When the sun was well up the light was turned off, and Larry went down to his quarters to get the sleep he so much needed.

He found the treasure box of the wreckers just where he had left it, no one having been near it, even to gratify idle curiosity. Taking another look at the treasure he rolled himself in bed, and was soon fast asleep.

He slept till high noon, and then came upon the balcony, where he found Anita reading an old book he had given her, and enjoying the balmy air of the summer day.

"Oh, isn't this a lovely day!" she exclaimed, as soon as she saw him, "and just think of what a storm was raging last night!"

"Yes, it's quite a change, indeed," he said, "though everything on shore looks just as it did at sunset yesterday."

"Of course; but the sea was roaring terribly last night," and she looked out upon the illimitable expanse of water, which now seemed to be agitated only by a gentle swell now and then.

"Old ocean has her angry moods, you know," he remarked, "but she smiles more than she frowns, though she is awfully destructive when angry as she was last night. Do you know I was really glad to see that storm?"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it completely wiped out all traces of our work on the beach, so the wreckers will not suspect that we have been there."

"They won't know what they have lost, then, till they go to remove it themselves?"

"No. Then they will be more likely to suspect treachery among their own number, for they don't know that we have any idea where it was buried."

"How fortunate you are! I declare I think you are the most lucky man in the world!"

"I sometimes think so myself," he remarked, "for I've been shot at a great many times, and once had a terrible death struggle right here on this balcony with the desperate leader of yonder gang of wreckers. I am indeed a lucky man."

"I am glad you have come through so many dangers unharmed, for your peril has been great."

"Thank you, Miss Anita. I sometimes think your presence in the lighthouse is the cause of my good luck."

She gave a soft silvery laugh, and said:

"Why, woman, they say, is at the bottom of all trouble!"

"Just as you will be at the bottom of mine when you go away, for I shall be in constant trouble till I see you again."

"Then you will have to come to see me in order to get out of trouble. Oh, I'm sure of seeing you again," and again she laughed that joyous, merry laugh which he so loved to hear.

"Of course I will. Now will you come and help me count the money in that box?"

"Yes, I am quite anxious to know how rich you are."

"Come on, then, and we will soon find out," and he led the way downstairs, where he sent Lem up to the lamps to clean and burnish them.

They spent several hours counting the gold and jewels and precious stones, which Anita, from her knowledge of diamonds and rubies, valued at over one hundred thousand dollars.

"Oh, that makes you rich!" exclaimed Anita.

"No; only one-fifth is mine," he replied. "There are five others, you know."

"Why, Mr. Lee! Are you counting me, too?"

"Of course I am. Why should I count Lem and Sancho and the old sailor, and not count you? Why, I always count you first."

She looked at him till her great brown eyes were filled with tears.

"I—I—cannot—take it," she finally said, her face crimsoning with blushes.

"Why not? Did you not take charge of the lamps while we went after it?"

"Because I do not need it," she replied. "I have a fortune sufficient for all my life. You may need it, for you have your way to work in the world. I will give you my share—there, that's the way we will do," and the idea seemed to please her so much that she smiled through her tears and looked really happy in what she had said.

"Miss Anita, I consider that you have made me a present of twenty thousand dollars. I would insist on your keeping it, only I know you do not need it. I will take it, provided you will let me make you a present of some diamonds."

"Just one—just one," she said, as she saw him taking up a handful of the precious stones. "I will take just one to remember you by. I will call it by your name, and think of you every time I see it."

"Then I will take the biggest one of the lot," said he, making choice of a very large diamond, which was one of the finest she had ever seen. How it sparkled and flashed in the sunlight which came in through the little window!

"Take this one; it's not half as bright as your eyes, and—"

"I appreciate the compliment," said she, laughing heartily, as she took the magnificent diamond, "and will have this put in a setting for a ring that will make me think of my experience in Manatee Lighthouse."

She then left the room, and Larry proceeded to set apart the share of the others, after which he went up to the balcony, where he found Lem and old Sancho at work on the lamps.

"Sancho," he said, turning to the old man, "can we go over to the swamp to-night?"

"Yes, marsa," he replied, looking away over toward the swamp, and then down the beach at the hut of the wreckers.

"Do you think we can find their treasure over there?"

"I dunno, marsa; it am mighty dark ober dere in dat swamp, an' de 'gators an' b'ars an' painters is mighty sassy."

Larry looked thoughtful for a minute or two, and then added:

"Yes, and our light would give the wreckers notice of our presence there. We must go in the daytime, Sancho?"

"Yes, sah, but den dey will see us on de water!"

"We'll go just before daylight and conceal ourselves in the swamp, where we will stay till the sun is up; how will that do?"

"Dat's de way, marsa!" and the old man's face lighted up with a lively smile. Anything that promised injury to the murderers of his boy pleased him, and he was ready to take a hand in.

"Then we will go before daylight to-morrow and see what we can find out," and then he went downstairs to look after his repeating rifle and revolvers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE YOUNG LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER VISITS THE SWAMP AND TRACKS THE WRECKERS.

WHEN night came on again Larry had Manatee Light in proper trim, and its grand brilliancy was seen many miles out at sea.

The young lighthouse keeper had arranged with Lem and the old

sailor to be up to attend to the light, when he and old Sancho were to slip away under cover of darkness, and pull for the great swamp in which the old man had lived so long.

Anita had begged to be allowed to attend to the light, but Larry said:

"No; you sleep on till long after sunrise. There's no use in breaking into your sleep at all. Lem has been with me all my life, and knows as much about the lamps as I do. Just let him and the old salt attend to it. You might see or hear something that would make you nervous. Sleep on; get all the sleep you can," and he spoke in such a hearty, cheerful way, that she could not insist on her request. So she went early to bed, so she could be up early in the morning to learn what had been done.

Larry remained with the lamps till near daylight, and prepared to go down where old Sancho was waiting for him. The old man had everything that would probably be needed already in the boat. Larry had his revolver and repeating rifle, and the old man was armed to the teeth.

"Are you ready, Sancho?" he asked of the old darky.

"Yes, marsa."

"Come on, then. We must row lightly so as not to be heard."

"Yes, sah—we kin do dat," and the old man got into the boat and took up an oar.

Larry followed and did likewise, both dropping the oars in the water without striking the oar-locks.

"Now, pull away."

Both used one oar each without touching the boat, and the boat glided silently through the water toward the spot where the waters of the swamp connected with the gulf.

The great light shone out resplendent over the dancing waters, and at times lit up the surroundings of the little boat.

"I guess no one is on watch on shore," remarked Larry in an undertone to the old man.

"No, sah, dey nebber watch when dere ain't no storm."

"Then we can have a chance to search the swamp, I think."

"Yes, sah. Day is breakin' now."

"Pull steady—that's it. We'll get into the creek before the dark goes away. Miss Anita has pointed out to me the very tree under which they passed into the swamp. I think I can find it without any difficulty."

"Dat won't do no good, massa," said old Sancho, "'cause dey don't go in twice at de same place."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, sah, dat am er fac'."

"Well, then, we must take our chances, and do the best we can."

"Yes, sah."

In due time they reached the mouth of the creek, and pulled upstream at least a quarter of a mile.

"You know all about the swamp, Sancho," said Larry, "so I will trust you to find a landing place. You know this place, do you?"

"Yes, sah,"

"Well, are there any alligators about here?"

"Dey's all ober-hyer, marsa," and the old man glared around as if to indicate his meaning.

It was still very dark, though, as the old darky said, day was breakin'. Gray streaks began to climb up the eastern horizon, sure precursors of coming day.

"We must stay in the boat till we can see which way we are going," Larry said.

"Yes, sah—you can't go froo dis hyer swamp in de dark."

"We don't want to fire at anything unless we are obliged to, Sancho, for the wreckers might hear the shot and suspect something wrong."

"Dat's er fac', Marse Larry," responded the old man, running the boat up a narrow arm of the creek, where the overhanging mass made it so dark that they could not see each other, though only five feet space lay between them.

"Do you know where you are going?"

"Yes, sah. I'se been hyer heap o' times."

"All right then."

They passed along under the overhanging mass for several minutes till the bow of the boat finally struck against the bank.

"Hyer we is, sah," said Sancho.

"Well, where are we?"

"In de swamp."

"So we are—I wouldn't have known it in the dark," and his tone was a little sarcastic. "Can you tell me whereabouts in the swamp we are?"

"Dis am er islan', marsa, whar we kin wait tiil de sun am up in de sky."

"Oh, yes—that's all right," and Larry felt quite relieved on hearing the fact. "It's as dark as Egypt."

"An' er safe place, too, marsa."

"All the better for that, then. The sun will be up soon, but I guess it never shines here even on the clearest days."

"No, sah—not much. It am er cool place in de daytime."

"Does anybody ever come here?"

"No, sah—dey is erfraid, marsa."

"Afraid of what?"

"Ghosts."

Larry felt his hair rise up on his head. Generally he was not afraid of ghosts, but he didn't want to meet one in such a dismal place as that. Oh, no. Anyone would rather meet a ghostly visitor on Broadway at about noon on a bright sunshiny day than in such a place as that.

"What do you mean, Sancho? Is this place haunted?"

"Yes, sah," was the cool reply of the old man.

"Then how came you to come here? I thought you were afraid of ghosts?"

"I ain't erfeard o' ruffin, Marse Larry, when you is wid me, an' dem ghosts allers go home afore midnight."

"Oh, they do, eh?" and Larry felt very glad to hear that.

"Yes, sah, dey does."

"They are very good ghosts, then—don't stay out late o' nights?"

"Yes, sah."

They waited an hour, during which time the light of day made considerable progress in penetrating the shades of that part of the great swamp.

By and by Larry could see through a small opening that the sun was up, as it shone brightly on the tree tops and hanging moss.

"We may as well land now, Sancho," said Larry, "and begin our search."

"Yes, sah."

"Is this a safe place to leave the boat?"

"Yes, sah."

"Come on, then," and he arose and stepped ashore on good, solid ground.

Sancho followed him, drawing the boat up to and securing it to the bank.

"Now, which way is the lighthouse from here, Sancho?" Larry asked. "I am completely out of my bearing."

Sancho very promptly pointed in the right direction, and then the young lighthouse keeper was himself again.

"Then we want to get out in this direction," said he, pointing toward that side of the swamp they had seen the wreckers enter several times.

He started off, with the old man at his heels, and pushed straight southward.

They had not gone fifty yards ere Larry discovered a mark on a tree, evidently made with the point of a knife. His keen sight detected it, not looking for it, and he halted.

"Look at that, Sancho," he said, pointing to the mark with the muzzle of his rifle.

Sancho glared at the mark, and seemed puzzled to know what to make of it.

The mark seemed to be a representation of a square with a handle to it.

"What's dat, marsa?" the old man asked.

Larry looked at the mark again, and discovered the figure thirteen underneath it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "I think I understand it now."

"What is it, marsa?"

"It means that something is buried within thirteen feet of this tree," replied Larry.

"Den we kin find it," returned Sancho, looking quickly around at every space of ground within fifteen or twenty feet of the marked tree.

"I think the handle probably points in the right direction," muttered Larry to himself, measuring the distance and direction with his eye.

Something in the peculiar formation of the tufts of grass attracted his attention to a certain spot. He ran to it and pulled up one of the bunches of grass.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and he pulled up another. Underneath was a plank surface. He cleared away several tufts of grass, and found that the planks were simply the lid of a box!

"Here it is!" and he seized the edge of the lid and raised it.

It was not even fastened.

The wreckers had kept it as a place of deposit for treasures as they accumulated. It was half full of gold, silver and jewelry, with watches, rings, and precious stones.

Old Sancho was amazed.

"We can't take up this box, Sancho," said Larry. "It's too large and would take too long to get it up. We want to get away as quick as possible. Get down on your knees here, and fill your hat and mine, while I stand guard for you."

"Yes, sah!" and in a moment the old man was down on his knees, filling the two hats with his treasure. When they were full he ran to the boat, emptied them into the bottom of it, and returned for another load. This he repeated a dozen times—carrying two hats full each time.

At the last turn Larry carefully put down the lid of the box, replaced the tufts of grass, and then went away, leaving but little trace of his visit save by the empty box.

"Ah, Sancho, you struck it just right, old man. You'll have enough to live on the rest of your life without care," and Larry shook hands with the old man as he entered the boat.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NEW DANGER TO THE LIGHT.

OLD Sancho's heart was too full for him to trust himself to speech. He dropped into the boat, took up the oars, and commenced the work of getting the craft out of the bayou.

He could move swiftly now, as there was light enough for him to see his way clear.

Out in the main creek, Larry took up two oars, placed them in the locks, and began to pull.

"There's no need of silence now," he said; "pull away, old man, and let's reach the light as soon as we can."

"Yes, sah," and old Sancho bent himself to the oars like a man pulling for life against an adverse current.

Pretty soon they passed the mouth of the creek, and pulled out into the gulf. They could see along down the beach clear to the wreckers' huts.

As they pulled for the lighthouse, they could see Anita Narcissa gazing at them through a ship's spyglass.

Larry waved his hat to her, to which she replied with her handkerchief.

"Look dar! Dem wreckers am er comin' suah!" exclaimed old Sancho, looking in the direction of the huts on the beach.

Larry looked and saw the wreckers, with rifles in their hands, running along the beach in the direction of himself and Sancho.

"Oh, they are coming up to get a shot at us," said he.

"Yes, sah!" and Sancho looked hard at the young lighthouse keeper as if to see what he would do under the circumstances.

"I don't want to kill any more of them," added Larry. "We've hurt 'em worse by taking their treasure than we could do by shooting 'em."

"Shoot 'em, massa—shoot 'em!" said Sancho, his hatred of the murderers of his boy being uppermost in his mind. "Dey ain't fit to live, dey ain't."

"Oh, we've killed half of them already, Sancho, and when they find out that we have got all their treasure they'll give us chances enough to kill 'em."

The old man looked sadly disappointed, and pulled away at the oars without saying another word.

Ere the wreckers reached the beach opposite the lighthouse the boat was out of range of their rifles. They gazed at the young lighthouse keeper through a ship's spyglass, as if to try to make out just what he was up to. Of course they could not see what was in the boat besides the two men, but it was very evident that they were excited over the visit to the swamp.

"They don't know what to make of it, Sancho," remarked Larry to the old man.

"No, sah, dey don't," was the reply.

"They'll find out some day, though, and then there'll be some hard swearing going on, I guess."

"Yes, sah."

They pulled for the lighthouse, and the wreckers walked leisurely along the beach toward their huts. But before the wreckers arrived at their homes Larry and Sancho reached the lighthouse and displayed the treasure they had found to the inmates.

Lem was almost beside himself with joy, and Anita congratulated the brave young lighthouse keeper on his success.

"It was the luckiest thing I ever saw," he said, when telling her of the circumstances of the finding of the hidden box. "It seems as if some higher influence led us to the very spot. Just think of it, the wreckers don't even suspect their loss."

Old Sancho chuckled as he listened. His hatred of the murderers of his boy was a second nature with him. Were they given into his hands to do as he wished with, they would die a horrible death—everyone of them.

The next day, as Larry and Anita were sitting on the balcony of the lighthouse, they saw two of the wreckers go into the swamp.

"They will find out about our visit now," he said to the young girl.

"They have probably gone to visit the treasure and will discover their loss."

"Oh, won't they be angry!"

"I guess they will," said Larry, laughing, "but I don't think it will do 'em any good."

"Oh, no, they can't help themselves, but they will be desperate for all that."

"Of course they will. We'll wait and see if they come out any faster than they went in."

A half hour passed, and the young couple watched for their appearance again.

"Oh—there they are," exclaimed Anita, the first to see them, as the two men burst out of the swamp, and ran toward the huts two miles away, as if some terrible danger pursued them.

"Ah! they have found it out, and are running to tell the others."

The others saw them coming and ran to meet them. They seemed to know that some terrible danger menaced them.

When they came together violent gesticulations were seen, and then the whole party hastened back to the swamp, as if to ascertain the full amount of their loss. They entered the swamp and disappeared from sight.

"Oh, they are mad enough now," said Larry, chuckling over the situation. "Those rascals have tried in every way to get me out of the lighthouse. They have shot at me and tried to murder me. I am glad I have gotten their gold. They shall never have it again."

Pretty soon they saw the wreckers come out again, and that they were in a terrible state of excitement. They seemed utterly bewildered, and made their way to the huts.

"They are in trouble now," said Larry, watching their movements through the spyglass. "As soon as the tide goes down they will examine the spot under that rock. Oh, they will find it has not paid to wage war against the Manatee Light. I have no sympathy for them whatever. Hello! There comes a sailboat up the coast inside the reefs! By the great waves, but that's what they sent two of their men away for a week ago."

The wreckers seemed overjoyed at sight of the sailboat. They ran down to the beach, and waved a welcome to the craft, which made good speed, having a spanking breeze behind her.

"It's a good, substantial craft," said Larry, "and capable of standing a rough sea. They must be preparing to go away to some other coast."

The little craft cast anchor and sent a boat ashore. The whole party then went aboard, as if to inspect the craft.

In the afternoon the tide went down, leaving the rock bare which had marked the spot of the buried treasure. Larry watched them with his spyglass.

One of the men went ashore and stood on the rock. He beckoned the others. They followed him, and then the stone was raised, a probe thrust into the wet sand, and the discovery of their loss was made.

"Ten thousand maledictions!" yelled Captain Blake. "Our labors of ten years have been taken from us! That old nigger, Sancho, has given us away. Our treasure is in that lighthouse. We must have it back at every hazard! Swear to have it, or die, men!"

"We swear to have it!" they cried.

"We have a boat," said Blake. "We can build a protection against his bullets and sail around the light and pick anyone off who attempts to light the lamps. Look to your rifles, men. We must fight for our treasure."

The wreckers now had but one idea—one desire—one thought—and that was to kill the young lighthouse keeper, and regain their ill-gotten treasure. They accordingly went to work, taking many pieces of ship timber, which innumerable wrecks had strewn along the coast, building a breastwork to protect them from the bullets of the young lighthouse keeper's repeating rifle.

This they completed by the next day and erected on the craft.

Larry was watching them all the time without being able to divine their real object.

But when they had placed the broad flat wooden structure in position, with numerous auger holes, through which to run their rifles, he was no longer at a loss to understand their game.

"By the great whales!" he exclaimed. "They are going to besiege the lighthouse! They will give us some trouble, too."

"Can they get in?" Anita breathlessly asked.

"No, but they can destroy the light, or at least keep me from lighting the lamps."

"Then you must not try to light the lamps," said she. "I will light them for you. They will not shoot at me—a woman."

"Yes they would—besides, you shall run no risk for me, or anyone else. Lem! Lem! Sancho!"

"Yes, sah!" came from old Sancho, below.

"Come up here, both of you, quick."

The two old blacks lost no time in obeying the call of the young lighthouse keeper.

"Do you see yonder boat?" Larry asked, as soon as they came up to the balcony.

"Yes, sah."

"Well, they are going to attack us from behind that barricade you see on deck there. We must get up those iron shutters down in the storeroom, and lash them to the balcony, on the land side. The light is not necessary on that side. They dare not go outside the reefs—or, if they do, it will be a long sail and great risk for them. Go down now, and bring them up, quick!"

The two darkies hastened to obey orders, while Larry continued to watch the movements of the wreckers.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

SANCHO and Lem lost no time in getting the iron shutters up to the balcony, where Larry had already provided ropes for the purpose of lashing them into position.

It seems the wreckers were also watching with a glass, and soon discovered what was going on up on the tower. They spread sails and came along up the coast between the reefs and the shore.

But before they came within range the four shutters were up and Larry was safe from their rifles on the landside, at least.

Sending Anita below out of harm's way, Larry took his repeating rifle and laid in wait for them, peeping through a crevice an inch or two in width.

The craft came within rifle shot, and the wreckers fired several shots against the shutters, as if to test their ability to resist them.

Larry kept quiet till some half a dozen shots had been fired, when one of the wreckers carelessly exposed a leg. The next moment the young lighthouse keeper sent a bullet through that leg, and immediately there followed an avalanche of profanity from the wounded wrecker.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Larry, "I am not so bad off as I thought I would be. If they stay on the land side I won't have to leave the light unattended. Ah! There was another chance!"

He kept watch, and when the wreckers thought themselves out of range of his rifle, they proceeded to shift the barricade and turn about to go past the lighthouse again. But they had miscalculated the range of that death-dealing repeating rifle, for Larry wounded three of them in rapid succession, which sent a panic into the whole crew. They ran the craft out of range and waited for night to close in for better protection.

Larry knew they were inside the reefs when the sun went down, and therefore had but little fears for the safety of the lamps during the night. He lit them up and set them going, keeping a strict watch, rifle in hand, all through the night. Several shots were exchanged, and one side of the glass of the light was shattered by a bullet. Otherwise the glass or the lamps were not hurt.

When morning came a vessel was seen about a mile away riding at anchor. It bore the United States flag, indicating the service to which it belonged.

"It's the supply ship!" cried Larry.

"Tank de good Lor!" exclaimed old Sancho.

"Bress de Lor!" cried Lem, beside himself with joy.

"The wreckers are leaving—they are going away!" shouted the old sailor, as he saw them cast overboard their barricade and hoist every sail to the breeze.

"Let 'em go. They will never come back again," said Larry.

"Our troubles are over. We will not be bothered any more."

A boat was lowered from the ship and an officer got into it, followed by several sailors. They soon reached the lighthouse, when they were welcomed by Larry and Lem, to whom the officer was well known.

Lieutenant Nelson was surprised to find so many people at the lighthouse, and asked for an explanation.

He was astonished when Larry told the story of his three months' war with the wreckers.

"There goes the last of them," said Larry, pointing to the sail which was making good time down the coast. "They are trying to make good their escape from capture."

He then explained the history of Anita Narcissa, the young Spanish girl, to whom the officer was extremely polite.

"Please return to the ship and pursue those rascals," Larry asked, "else they will return when you go away and wage a war of extermination against all connected with Manatee Light."

The officer returned to the ship and reported to the captain, who promptly commenced pursuit of the little sailing vessel. The two vessels passed out of sight, but the next day the supply ship returned with the report that the wreckers had got entangled among the coral reefs and were all drowned.

"Tank de Lor' for dat!" fervently ejaculated old Sancho.

"Oh, I am so glad for your sake!" said Anita, turning to Larry.

"Thanks," said he. "I don't think we shall have any more trouble now."

The ship sent in the supplies that were intended for Manatee Light, and then Anita opened negotiations for passage to Mobile for herself, old Sancho and his wife. Having plenty of coin, which Larry had pressed upon her to pay her way home, the young lady was determined to go.

"I have a splendid home in Cuba," she said, "and will take care of the old couple as long as they live. Of course they have plenty to keep them comfortable, but I will look after them. I want one promise from you, Mr. Lee."

"I will give it," he said, promptly, "even if it is to jump from this balcony into the sea."

"Oh, I will not ask that," she said, blushing rosy red. "I will simply ask you to come and see me in my own home."

"I give you my word and honor I will," he replied. "I am going to send my resignation as lighthouse keeper by this very ship, and as soon as I am relieved I shall visit Cuba. Now I want a promise from you. Will you give it?"

"Yes, with all my heart," she replied.

"Ah, that dear little heart is what I am after!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips. "I love you, Anita, and want you to promise to be my wife. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes, Larry," she said, softly, "for I have loved you from the first."

He dropped her hand, and taking her in his arms, pressed her to his heart and covered her blushing face with kisses.

Reader, our story ends with a few more lines. Three months after Anita and the two faithful blacks left the Manatee Lighthouse; a successor came to take the place of Larry Lee. Larry showed him through the tower, and taking his faithful Lem and his fortune, went aboard the ship bound for New Orleans. The old sailor, with his share of the wreckers' fortune, settled down to pass his days in quiet, whilst Larry and Lem took ship for Havana. Anita received him with a loving welcome, and married him a week later. Thus ended the romance of the YOUNG LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER.

[THE END.]

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